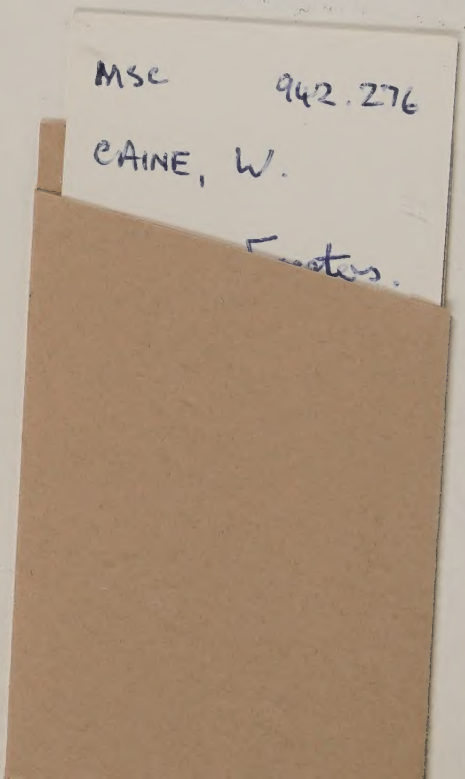
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THE NEW FORESTERS

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BY

WILLIAM CAINE

AUTHOR OF "BOOM," "HOFFMAN'S CHANCE," ETC.

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L. M. W.

WITH THANKS

My thanks are due to the *British Review* for permission to republish chapter XXVII.

WILLIAM CAINE.

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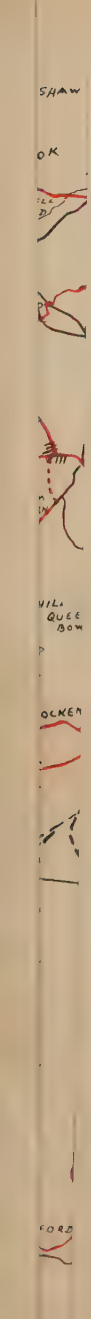
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THE NEW FORESTERS

Warning.

Intelligent persons (that is to say nearly all persons) will do well to close this pretty book at once. It is no book for them. Nothing happens that is of the slightest importance; the progress is the snail's; and there is no serious instruction whatever in the book. I tell such people plainly that I shall prove intolerable. If, in the face of this warning, they persist (for they may have spent their money carelessly on the thing and, being intelligent, would rather be vexed than defrauded), when my prediction comes true and they find themselves forced to the baser choice, let them not blame me while they wrap this book up and address it to somebody who is going to celebrate a birthday. I have done my best and earliest to give them to know what to expect.

But to the remnant that can contemplate with fat eyes a period of enormous leisure, to those few who are still egregiously indolent, to whomsoever the covering of miles is not the end of existence, the transit of counties with all dispatch a thing in itself desirable, to the diminished band of

the Easy Goers, to the Loafing Fraternity, to the Sons of Rest and the Daughters of Inaction, to every such I say "Come on!" There is a spare place in the cart and my wife is the best company in the world. Sit there if you will (and I advise it). But when your legs are positively that way inclined, you may walk with me and I will see that you lend us your shoulder up the hills.

I. *Of Us and of an Ass.*

If you pass between the temptations of the Green Dragon and the Bell and, leaving Brook, follow your nose along the Fordingbridge Road which goes up straight and white, to vanish, as in a tunnel, under the great beech woods of Bramble Hill Walk, you will very quickly find yourself free from all houses and hedges. The Common is on either hand. You will naturally wish to tread its turf.

At this time of the morning and in this very fine weather, I would have you avoid that crest which lies to your left, attractive though it must be to you with its promise of wide discoveries. For if you go that way, you will find yourself among the golfers—which Heaven forbid! The pernicious creatures will be all over the place making their fussy little noises at you, their unnecessary ridiculous little intimations to you of the awful things that may chance to happen to you if they, peradventure, should at last succeed in hitting their ball strongly in your direction. I would not have you teased by golfers.

Not a doubt but they are all hard at it, poor devils, whacking away and sweating and cursing and making life a misery for themselves after their

own incredible fashion. You will be wise to leave their territory alone now and wait until evening when they will all be gone home to tell their wives about their strokes—about every one of their strokes. Yes, that part of the Common is best in the evening when the sun is down behind Fritham Plain and the night begins to fill the great valley of firs between this ridge and the Stony Cross Highlands. Later the inn over there makes one spot of light just above an immensity of gloom that is the King's Garn Gutter Inclosure; Westwards and Northwards there is the afterglow above the Bramble Hill trees; and Eastwards Southampton flares yellow to heaven.

Or is that end of the Common best in the early morning, when the low sun throws long blue shadows and long golden lanes among the hollies, and threads of white mist veil the low ground under the fir woods and the young air you breathe goes down so sweetly? I do not know, because I have never been out there in the early morning; but morning and evening the golfers are away from the Common and these are the times to visit it; and even when they are there it is not a thing to miss.

At present I invite you elsewhere—to the right. You'll find the track easily enough. Not too much to the right: not up that broad green rise, for instance, or you'll be at the post office before you can say knife, and that would never do at all. We do not want any stamps to-day. To-morrow is for stamp buying; or the day after. Or some time next week.

No. Look to your left, and you will see a long mass of woods ; to your right front, and you will find there a number of meadows. The woods and the meadows converge, and your line is between the two. Soon you will strike the track with its cart ruts and its little bridge over a gully and then all is plain sailing. Go forward at your leisure ; there is no cause for haste and at every step of the way you may profitably look about you. You will cross the ends of two or three very enticing glades. Never mind them. Proceed. In ten minutes, if you travel with anything like the proper deliberation, you will find yourself in a place which you cannot possibly mistake.

You come quite suddenly upon it, over its grassy entrance. You are gazing into a vast oval lawn, kept always green by springs. It tilts downwards to a brook (this is, by the way, the brook of Brook) and all around it stand the great beeches, looking on like an audience.

There are spots which are clearly designed for the transaction of ancient and lovely and terrible things, long green hollows in the chalk downs, certain serene pools of wooded tidal rivers, little remote Welsh bays, high corries hidden in the hills of Scotland, and tarns, black as ink, under her crags. Amphitheatres every one of them. If you have the right kind of feeling for this world in which you live, you do not need to be told when you have found one of these places. The knowledge comes instantly, and so I hope that I do not need to tell you that you have come to one of these places now.

Extraordinary things happen here undoubtedly, but only the beeches see them. I never come here without feeling the solemn expectancy of those large trees. And they are not expecting me. My wife will have it that the Bramshaw fairies use this place a great deal by moonlight—for dancing, you know. Personally I feel that there is too much room here for fairies; I think they would look for cosier quarters. There is a little lawn, now, close to the Fordingbridge Road, that should be perfect for fairies. As for this place, I incline to the belief that the beeches dance here themselves. My wife says that beeches are too serious to dance, but I don't know. In the Spring, perhaps—when their leaves are budding. I wouldn't trust them.

I have said that these trees are not expecting the likes of us, but this is not to say that they don't make my wife and me very welcome. After a few moments that impression of expectancy wears off. One feels that one is being put up with good-humouredly. Whatever was about to happen has been postponed. It is all right. One may stay. The little intrusives will pass. The desire of meat or of bed or some such footling necessity will carry them off very soon. The beeches have plenty of time for their purposes. Nothing, it is agreed, shall occur to terrify the small people. The wind carries the word round in a whisper and the glade becomes perfectly friendly; absolutely presses one to stop.

Therefore, if you will move round from the entrance, to the left towards the head of the lawn,

stepping softly over the moss and dead leaves that make the ground glorious, you will come, without any trouble, upon a very small governess-cart in which, with her hair down, clad in a fine new cherry-coloured silk jersey and an ancient black skirt, with a Spanish dictionary, a note-book, a pencil and a novel by Señor Blasco Ivanez all in her lap, is a young woman. She is my wife and she is studying Spanish. Her head reclines upon the crook of an arm; her lips are slightly parted; her eyes are fast closed. It is thus and not otherwise that, she informs me, she most easily commits a vocabulary to memory. From time to time a light guttural sound breaks the stillness that surrounds her. She is probably practising the pronunciation of that difficult letter "jota." The sunlight, impatient of intervening boughs, takes the breeze into its confidence, and flutters all over her, tremulous with happiness.

His tail between the shafts of the governess-cart, his head in a holly-bush, stands an ass, mouse-grey, close-clipped. This is Jack the Third. His occupation is the reflective chewing of prickles. The sunlight flutters upon the ass too—also upon me.

I am over there, on the root.

What am I doing?

It doesn't matter, but in case you should have bad enough taste (when your eyes might be so much better employed) to look over my shoulder, I may tell you that I am painting those trees on the other side of the glade. In water-colour

I am doing it. Yes, God forgive me! I am trying to paint beeches in the tender beauty of their young leaf.

Out upon me?

By all means. But—don't raise your voice, for my wife must not be disturbed while she is working. Lie down rather,—here's a rug; and a cushion for your head. The Cigarettes are by your elbow. So! Let me now make you an excuse for abandoning this hopeless business of water-colour painting and let me tell you how we come to be, this merry May morning, here and not in Lyndhurst as we would surely be had Jack not taken it into his head to run all the way from Brockenhurst, yesterday, to Brook.

II. *Of a Caravan Tour and of a Resolution.*

A FEW summers ago, on a hot afternoon in early August, a vast caravan might have been seen moving deliberately upon the high-road which leads from Salisbury to Southampton. Inside it were a young woman and a man; without were two bulging horses and their driver, hired in Salisbury. My wife and I were busy with the first stage of our celebrated month's caravan-tour of the New Forest.

This adventure had been among our designs for a long time. To sleep out under the stars with but the roof of our moving home between; to wake while the dawn should steal mysteriously upon the earth, —pearl-grey, grey-blue, rose, 'gold; to hear the birds pipe their pæan of praise to the sun; to be one with the small folk of the woods, the feathered tribe, the furry clan; to do all this had been our desire for years. And now behold us! on our way to do it.

We were worried by no anxieties concerning the pitch of our first camp. That had been arranged. There was to be no trouble with farmers, jealous of their rights, suspicious of the tourist, greedy of gold, necessary to be appeased before a halt may be made. That was not our idea of caravanning.

We looked forward to no lighting of fires and cooking of pots, no hewing of wood and drawing of water, no grooming of horses, no fetching of milk and carrying of butter, nor to any mad wrestling with tins of food. Our conception of caravanning included none of those woes. The sleeping in the field, the mystery of the dawn, the vocalization of the feathered choir—these were the things we coveted. The fire and the pot, the kettle and the horse, the milk-hunt and the sardine-opener—these we proposed to do without.

And how? It was very simple.

The man who had let the caravan to us had given us an address. Letters had been exchanged. Our cooking was to be done for us in the Boarding Cottage and there our meals were to be eaten. We were to bring nothing to table but healthy appetites; no record of honest work done, no self-approval of our own energy and handiness should lend savour to our eating. I am unable to express the measure of our inability to be disturbed by the prospect of lacking these essentials to the camp meal, as generally imagined.

The ladies who owned this Boarding Cottage to which we were travelling had arranged for our pitch in a field at a convenient distance from breakfast, luncheon and dinner. They had, we understood, caused a plank to be laid across a ditch, thus shortening our journey to table by some undesirable minutes. Their little servant was to do up our caravan for us in the mornings, while we breakfasted. Hot water was to be brought

to us at any hour at which, overnight, we should signify our intention of rising.

As for the horses, they were to return to Salisbury with their owner. Once in our field, we should have no need of them—nor, for a week, of any horses whatever. After a week we would hire other horses and another driver and move to some other place where the annoyances of a free existence should again be withheld from us.

So, as we travelled along the Southampton road, we had nothing to anticipate in our camp-life save those ideal matters which I have already mentioned.

Yet were we not happy.

It is impossible, you say, for some people to be satisfied.

Not at all. Pass me a law (Short Acts I think these admirable revolutionary measures are called) suppressing all motor traffic outside the four-mile radius from Charing Cross, and I will be prepared to revel in caravanning along the high-roads.

In a word, we were choked with dust. It came in whether we shut all the windows and the door or no. It distressed us extremely. It came in where the air would not. We stifled.

At times I was compelled to get out of my easy chair and walk beside the horses. But this was not my idea of caravanning. My wife swathed her nose and mouth in muslin till she looked like an odalisque ; her poor eyes reproached me for allowing myself to be persuaded to embark upon this terrible enterprise. We could not see the scenery for dust. We did not want to see the scenery. We

wanted to get to Brook and be done with this parched hell in which we crept.

The horses and their driver would by no means be hastened.

The motorists went by—five cars, apparently, to the minute. Out of the gritty fog where they took their pleasure they would loom, hooting hideously, insult us with their cold, superior stares (the stare of a goggled motorist is the most offensive thing that is allowed) and pass on, churning up further clouds, dwindle to a blur and vanish, pursued by my curses. I began to fear that our caravanning was to prove more like the Arabian original than I had hoped. Somewhere on the Salisbury–Southampton road a heap of sand would presently mark the spot where we and the horses had all miserably perished. And there, some day, our bleached bones would be found, eloquent of our end.

It was in a desperate condition that we arrived, ultimately, at Brook ; but as Miss Ellen came to her gate to welcome us, all our cares departed away ; for Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie allow no care to come near anybody but themselves. Not for a moment.

We spent our month in the field they had provided, nursed by them and by the little maid they provided, and by the young boy they provided—the boy who cleaned our boots and brought us our hot water and fresh-cut bread-and-butter and tea in the morning, and letters when there were any —and by the good, kind man they provided who filled our water tank and fathered us generally.

We should be in that field now had not the man who let the caravan to us wanted our pitch for himself. But we forgive him. He sent us there.

So, though we enjoyed every minute of our caravan-tour, when we had finished it we were very little wiser about the Forest than when we began it. Yet still we were resolved to know the Forest. But how? But how?—the high-roads being intolerable.

"The truth is," I told my wife, "that the roads are now quite spoilt and he is a madman who remains there an instant longer than he can help. Time was when The Road had a magic sound; but to-day, ah me! what is The Road? A place of terror in wet weather, of torment in dry. Mud flies, dust envelops and God's sweet air is all odious with petrol. And the loathsome sounds these rascals make! Grunting like swine they overtake you and pass; eructating like the drunken, they swoop upon you round corners, cover you with filth and vanish over a hill; hooting like demons of the Lower Pit, they skid towards you, shave your elbow and, with a grin for your agility, are gone. Where now shall you take the wayside meal, the beast browsing beneath the shade, the food spread out upon the clean young grass, some chance guest of The Road pitching his tale? For there is now no clean young grass along The Road and the grit of macadam never added relish yet to a sandwich. And to-day no one lingers long enough by the highway to make chance guests. We all hurry on, stopping our noses.

"Comfortably to explore the forest," said I,

" we require an ass and a cart—a very small cart —such an ass and cart as we have used on many previous occasions in other places. Thus shall you and the baggage be transported from place to place, even as in a caravan. And are there not inns everywhere throughout this happy land? We will go among the trees where a horse and van would stick. We will leave the roads to those for whom they are suitable. It is a bold car that shall follow us under the trees. There our ears shall be offended by nothing harsher than the jay's cry, our noses by nothing worse than the good beast-smell of a fox. And our eyes shall stay open for all that they are fit to see. Yes," I continued, " we will give up The Road, as we have given up the River below Henley and most of the Sea and as—the Lord help us!—we shall soon have to give up the Sky itself. Yes, under the trees in our ass-cart, though the lightning smite us there, the aeroplane," I said, " shall haply stay aloft among the boughs. As I live," I concluded, " the Woods are our only refuge."

" And where," said my wife, " are we to get the donkey? "

III. *Of Three Asses and of the Buying of Asses and of Other Things.*

We have had to do, in our time, with three asses, to wit, Jack the First, Jack the Second and Jack the Third. One is aware of a certain monotony in the naming of these beasts, a certain unimaginative quality. But it is not our fault. They have never been our asses; always somebody else's asses. That is why.

Everybody calls his ass Jack. Had we an ass of our own we should see to it that he was wittily named. The beasts of an author should always be wittily named; it is expected of them. In the naming of the beasts the author has a chance of expressing his gentle humour, his erudition, or some other quality with which he may be supposed to be furnished. Thus, if I should have an ass I might call him Lucius. People would almost certainly ask me why I called him by this name. I should say, "Old Apuleius, you know," leaving them impressed with the belief that I was familiar with Apuleius in the original, whereas I read his interminable romance in a Bohn crib. Or if I preferred to express my gentle humour, I would get my wife to find some gently humorous name for the ass. Or I might show forth my erudition

by calling him the Russian for ass, whatever that is, or the Fantee for ass. But until we possess one of these beasts this problem may remain unattacked—seriously at least. Often—just before going to sleep I toy with the idea of finding a fit name for an ass, if ever one should belong to us. But I never do this seriously because, if I found a name that pleased me, I should have to find something else to do when I am composing myself to rest, and that would be a nuisance.

Of Jack the First I have written elsewhere, and as it is immoral for anyone but a professional journalist to sell more than once that which he writes, I deny you the pleasure of here discovering my opinion of that animal, and I leave the subject where it is, not without the hope that you may be stimulated to research which can only result in our mutual profit.

Of Jack the Second I will tell you this much. He was a meagre, a humble, and a lovable beast, his hire was a shilling a day, and he inspired us with this great donkey-tour idea, for which we are very much obliged to him. Hence these pages. Hence our presence under the beeches of Brook. Hence many charming experiences to us occurring. Hence, indeed, Jack the Third.—Of whom now.

An immense number of things have to be provided before a donkey-tour becomes practicable, but there can be no doubt that the donkey is the first. It is not, however, altogether easy to obtain a donkey. People in the country want their donkeys themselves; they are not disposed to hire them out for three weeks

at a time. There are coals to cart, for instance.

One can buy a donkey, of course; four pounds is an outside price, unless one is going in for racing. And the tour over, one can get rid of him. One can sell him again perhaps or give him away or board him out for the rest of his life in some kind family. I should think one could do this for about fifteen pounds a year, perhaps even less. But how does one buy a donkey? There is a donkey-market in London, but I do not know where it is to be found, for the man who told my wife and me about it (he was a professional ass-driver of Hampstead Heath) was much too clever to let us into the secret of its whereabouts. He gave nothing away, did that ass-driver.

One might get one at Thingumy's. They have all sorts of animals at Thingumy's, I believe. One would go, I suppose, to the animal-counter and say, "I would like to look at some donkeys, please. For driving, you know." And the man would take out a herd or so and one would make one's choice and pay one's money and have it wrapped up and sent home. But how should a fool like myself make his choice? I know nothing about donkeys. They might sell me one with the rinderpest on it, and I should be no wiser. I reflect in no way upon Thingumy's when I say this; only on myself. Thingumy's is an eminent and honourable firm, but, you know, in horse-dealing, eh? the ordinary rules do not apply. And ass-dealing must be something like it. It may be worse. Even with Thingumy's one would

be the better of a little knowledge in such a transaction. It is notorious that one may not expect any excessive conscience in a Limited Company, and I am sure that the temptation to work off Old Rinderpest on the mug would be too great for Thingumy's in their capacity of donkey-dealer.

On that same occasion when we heard about the London donkey-market my wife had half a thought (which she whispered to me) of suggesting to our professional driver that he might part to us with his own handsome black she-ass. I approved. I felt that a beast which was docile enough to be mounted by inebriated merry-makers and the little children of the wealthy might reasonably be expected to behave itself under my guidance. But the fellow, with the devilish perception of the horse-trader, saw my wife's half-thought in my eye and instantly began to talk his donkey up. He said quickly that it was the best donkey in London, which was no more than one would expect. But he added that it was a prize one, never beaten. He began to tell me of its triumphs, but I turned sadly away. Who was I to belabour a prize donkey—a donkey that had never been beaten—round the New Forest? I felt that I was not worthy of this peerless beast and my wife took alarm. She whispered that it would cost anything from seven to ten pounds to begin with and that *then* we should have to get a cart for it entirely overlaid with silver plate and mother-of-pearl. And it was agreed already between us that economy was to be the keynote of our journey. For to

undertake an extravagant donkey-tour is like using your Windsor Uniform for gardening. It is to violate the decencies, the fitnesses—it is as bad as blasphemy.

I gave up the thought of buying a donkey. This thing was too difficult for me. I have reduced the horrid business of purchase to its ultimate point of simplicity. I only buy two things, clothes and Cigarettes. My Cigarettes come whenever I send a postcard to their beneficent manufacturer. When I want a hat I go into my hatters and say "I want a hat." A week later the hat arrives. It is always the same shape and I hope it suits me. So with boots. I write to or visit my bootmaker, saying, "Furnish me with boots." In my bootmaker's good time my boots appear. They are always the same pattern and colour. When I want a tie, I go into any tie-purveyor's and I say "Give me a tie like this" and I show him my tie. All the purveyors have ties like mine. So with collars and flannel shirts. For clothes I visit my tailor and say "Show me some patterns." He does so. I choose the first grey pattern and I go away.

I used to know a man who would spend two hours looking at all the grey patterns in his tailor's shop a hundred times before he would choose one. It was quite impossible for him to say, when he tried on his clothes, whether they were made of the cloth he had chosen or not. But though I was always pointing this out he went on in his own preposterous courses. He said that it made the tailor take an interest in a man. He said that all

that kind of thing resulted in well-cut clothes. As if that were of any importance. And with it all he was never satisfied. Never. No one is who takes trouble about his clothes. Now I am always satisfied.

My wife is one of those people who take trouble about their clothes. She is never satisfied—with my clothes at any rate. That is why she gives me beautiful coloured silk handkerchiefs at Christmas and fine giraffe-skin gloves on my birthday. She hopes that I may try and live up to those things. I often wonder at her optimism.

I have not elaborated the business of buying into such a perfect and lovely simplicity without a good deal of trouble. And from the fact that I have bestowed care upon the matter I know that all purchasing is distasteful to me. It is troublesome. That is enough. And all purchasing includes ass-purchasing. I have not invented this system of mine to abandon it over an ass.

My wife, who has refined the art of purchase in a manner the opposite of my own, would have liked nothing better than an expedition to the ass-market—one could find it, of course ; these private enquiry men are said to be clever—and an examination of five hundred and seventy, or more if there were more, donkeys, grey, brown, black, white, yellow, chocolate or blue. I can imagine her considering their various qualifications for the business of transport, their beauty, the soulfulness of their eyes, the softness of their noses, the musical quality of their bray, their responsiveness to

sugar, their becomingness to herself. She would never think of rinderpest or glanders or spavin or weak knees or addiction to roaring. (Now I would think of nothing but these things and, if I should buy, I should never be happy until I knew which one afflicted my purchase. For to know the worst is practically to be done with trouble.) My wife was very anxious to visit the ass-market.

I asked her, supposing she should buy an ass, what she would do with it, until our tour should begin? Would she keep it in our flat, for instance? And how were we to get it into Hampshire? "By train," she said. I invented a cost for horse-boxes which staggered her. Economy, I said, was to be the keynote of our trip, I thought. Or wasn't it? She admitted that it was.

Having vanquished her I threw myself on her mercy. I confessed my real reason for not wishing to buy an ass in the ass-market, my terror lest, confronted by scores of asses and their villainous owners, I should, while attempting to play the part of an intelligent buyer, prove myself so much the most excellent ass present that I should be stolen away from her by some gipsy horse-coper and sold into slavery to some entirely intolerable hawker of stale fishes, a fate which I could not bear to contemplate. She accordingly was merciful and said that I should not be plagued with the purchase of our steed.

She would get Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie to find one for us.

Then my mind was wholly at rest. If Miss Ellen

and Miss Jessie were to be called in there was nothing more to worry about.

As the event proved.

Wasn't I going to tell you about Jack the Third? Well, I think he will come in better a little further on.

IV. *Of an Imperfect Ass.*

Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie gladly assumed the responsibility which we offered them. Fortune smiles upon all who have dealings with these ladies, and it was not, therefore, at all surprising to us that they found themselves at this identical moment in need of a donkey. Time has lately at length begun to tell upon their Billy. He is not as young as he once was ; and he once was eighty-three. His age is now quite incredible for anything but a parrot, a toad or an elephant. And he is none of these, being a pony. For long he has dwelt in his meadow, distorted with fat, browsing delicately all day on lushest grasses, forgetful of the shafts, the flies his only trouble. His mistresses are willing to pay the rent of this meadow for no other purpose than providing this luxurious and obese person with a shady and long-drawn-out Euthanasia. Billy shall have a companion, an ass. It will lend him a fresh interest in life. By this time he knows his meadow so intimately that it will give a quite new relish to its vegetation to have someone to forestall in the more succulent regions—someone who does not know his way about. This arrival will probably tone Billy up for another thirty years at least.

The ass, then, was to be bought by Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie, we were to pay for it, and they were to own it, granting to us over it the easement of user on demand. That was the arrangement.

I now dismissed the matter from my mind. In one week or two an ass would be provided. I experienced so much relief that I began three novels. I generally begin a novel when I have a sudden freedom from anxiety; but it is only rarely that I begin as many as three. That marks a very unusual sense of carelessness. A week passed. Another. Frequently we heard from Miss Ellen. She was scouring the New Forest on her bicycle. The New Forest is filled with donkeys and Miss Ellen was seeing them all. News reached us of this lady at Brockenhurst and East Boldre, at Hordle and West Wellow. For a fortnight she covered the roads of the district, indefatigable in her pursuit of the perfect ass. Lymington saw her, flitting down its long old street; Burley in its dell marked her rapid passage; Deadman Hill could not daunt her, nor No Man's Land defeat her search for it and the ass that it was said to contain. An ass, an ass, her kingdom for an ass! Oh! the talking up of the exceptional creatures which Miss Ellen visited and the talking down which they suffered as she surveyed them! Everywhere she found the best donkey in the New Forest. In ten places she found the best in Hampshire and in one the best in England. This was the worst she saw. Oh! the twinkling of her spokes as she sped from place to place! Oh! the brayings of disappointment that went up everywhere behind her! Not

a donkey of them all but would have parted with his ears to belong to her. For the ass is the wisest of brutes.

None was good enough. She wrote postcards to us to say so.

Anxiety began to prey once more upon my spirits and, abandoning my three new novels, I took to watching for the postman.

Suddenly the news came. The ass was found. No matter where. It was found. It was a she-ass, a white she-ass, excellently fuzzy and gentle as a sucking dove, sturdy, young and without a suspicion of rinderpest about it. It was called Jinny. Not only was it found, but it was bought, paid for, and delivered. Our ass was assured to us. At once I began a new novel. It was one of the very best I have ever begun. It was so good that some day I must finish it.

Why didn't I finish it ?

Because the next day I was smitten to the earth by further news.

It appeared that Jinny possessed the habit (not mentioned by her vender, unwilling no doubt to speak harshly about his pet) of lying down in the road at unexpected moments. The particular unexpected moment which she chose for the first display of her propensity happened to coincide with that in which a heavy motor-car, laden with terrified people, tore down, round a corner, upon Miss Jessie and Miss Ellen and Jinny and the governess-cart. Some miracle happened and averted destruction. I believe that, as soon as they had all recovered their senses, the man at

the wheel found some very pertinent observations to make and made them. Among these he recommended Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie to prolong their drive only so far as the knacker's.

He jumped out of the car and jerked Jinny to her feet cursing because of the peril with which the poor beast's desire for repose and his own improper speed had threatened Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie. Then he leaped back into his car and drove off, venting his frightened anger through his hooter.

Jinny was quite impossible.

But Miss Ellen was on the track of further asses. You are not to suppose Miss Ellen dauntable by any such small misadventure as that which I have related. Jinny was forced back upon the teeth of her vender; the purchase money was extorted from his breeches pocket—and behold Miss Ellen scouring afresh!

My novel waited upon her movements and reports.

Weeks passed and other duties became imperative. Tenants had presented themselves for our flat. There were agents to interview; things to buy. For a time we had to give up worrying about the ass.

V. *Of a House Agent and of Certain Tenants.*

I DON'T know if you have ever let your flat. If not it may interest you to hear how it is done. I will tell you how we did it.

Our first step was to the office of Messrs. Musser.

An affable young gentleman received us, begged us to be seated, and opened a huge book at us.

I said, "My name——"

He interrupted me civilly enough. "Where is your flat, please?" he asked. I told him.

"The rent I am asking——" I said, but he held up his hand.

"And your name?" he said.

I gave him my name. He thanked me. "There are two sitting-rooms," I said, "and three bedrooms with what you call, I think, 'the usual offices.'"

"What rent do you ask?" said he.

I told him. "I am leaving my piano," I added, "but not the player. You see, we are going first on a donkey-tour in the New Forest, but afterwards we are going to a house in Wiltshire for a couple of months. We shall want the player there, you know."

"How many rooms are there in the flat?" he asked.

I gave him this information. "We leave plate and linen," I said, "but only at the full rent asked. Of course we are prepared to take less than I told you, but I think," I said, "that it is wise to ask rather more than one is prepared to take. Don't you? People like to make a bargain, eh? They will always try to beat one down, so one may as well let them." I expected him to compliment me on my business acumen. Instead he gave one little sigh and asked if I had a piano and if I meant to leave it.

I said "Yes, but not the player." I began to explain to him why we were not going to leave the player, but he wouldn't listen to me. He made a note in his book and asked if we were to leave the plate and linen.

I told him yes, but only at the full rent. I said also that there was electric light throughout.

He said I had mentioned a player, would I be leaving that? I said No. We should want it in Wiltshire. And that reminded me that there was no central heating in the flats but that there was a lift.

He asked me whether there was electric light in the flat.

"Yes," I said, "throughout. And a gas stove."

"Have you," he enquired, "central heating?"

"No," said I.

"Have you a lift?"

"Yes," said I. "But after eleven o'clock at night it stops running. The under-porter, poor man," I said, "must have his sleep—like the rest of us."

He did not care about the under-porter. He wanted to know if there was a gas stove.

I said we had.

"And there is a porter, I presume?"

"Two," said I. "They wear gold-laced caps and coats with brass buttons. There is also a boy. His name is Sydney."

"Thank you," he said. "That will be all the particulars we require. Here are our terms"—he handed me a printed slip—"I have no doubt at all that we shall let your flat immediately."

"Oh," I said, "but I don't want that. Not for two months. We don't go out for two months, remember."

"Very good," he said, with a smile. "We will make a note of that."

"And," I said, "no young children. They wreck the furniture, don't they? And no dog or cat. These points are vital, if you please."

"They shall be noted," he assured me, bowing us out.

Then we went to three more agents.

Then we went for a walk.

When we got back to the flat there was a lady standing on the mat.

She was engaged in conversation with Siena.

Siena drew her attention to us, advancing upon them down the passage.

"I am come," said this lady, "to look at your flat. From Mussers', you know."

"Now," I thought, "here is something like an agent! That is what I call brisk."

We made this lady welcome. My wife showed

her all over the flat. She was enchanted with it. She vowed she would have it.

"This bedroom, looking south," she said, "will have all the sun. It is the very thing for my two little boys."

The eye of my wife sought mine; found it.

"The situation," said the lady, "is delicious. I long to be here. We are in a hotel at present —so expensive, isn't it? And I'm sure that the air of Bloomsbury is bad for Chang."

"Chang?" said my wife.

"My Pekingese," said the lady. "When do you think is the very earliest that you could let us in? Monday?"

It was then Wednesday.

She was quite angry with us for wasting her time, showing her over a flat that was not to let for two months.

During the next week ten people called. They all wanted our home instantly. Some of them could hardly be persuaded to quit the place. They seemed to think it would be a convenience if we would put on our hats and go away, leaving them installed.

Siena became more and more indignant with Mussers'.

Every day I forgot to write or go round to Mussers'. I was beginning novels at that time. That was the period when Miss Ellen had just undertaken her search for our ass.

At last my wife went.

Then we had no more applicants for six weeks.

. . . . . .

We abandoned the idea of letting the flat.

We left off talking about the preparations that would be necessary, should we let it.

We gave up the practice of discussing what we should do with the money we were to receive from our tenants.

I ceased to order, on the strength of the rent those tenants were to pay to us, (as I had been doing ever since Messrs. Musser promised to let the flat for us) all the attractive things that I saw in the shop windows.

I took to spending hours alone with my pass-book, calculating gloomily. By the exercise of abject economy an exit from debt seemed possible in about ten months.

And the time fixed for beginning the donkey-tour was almost upon us and we had no donkey.

. . . . . .

Suddenly a great sum of money was dangled before our eyes. We had tenants. Bankruptcy might yet be averted. It was a marvellous moment.

These tenants were exceptional tenants in that they made no bones about the rent we asked. But they must come in within the week.

And we were going out within five days.

But we had ceased to talk about making preparations for tenants. And we had made none.

But we wanted their money. It was necessary to us.

Here is an instance of the economy of running into debt, the existence of which so many people

deny. Had I not run into debt in the expectation of tenants we should never have attacked the monstrous labour which now confronted us. We should have told those tenants that it couldn't be done.

But it had to be done. And it was done.

Consequently I am not only out of debt but possessed of many attractive things and comfortably in pocket to boot, and all because I pledged my credit where another would have gone cautiously and waited for the signing of the agreement before ordering so much as a new pair of curtains.

During four days we toiled like galley-slaves. Everything had to be cleared out. Everything had to be put away in the "reserved" cupboard. Everything else had to be packed for use during an absence of five months. And when everything had been put away in the reserved cupboard, and when everything else had been packed, it had all to be taken out again to see whether it had been packed or put away.

There was my straw hat, for instance.

When I came to it I decided to put it away. I would get a new straw hat when the hot weather came. This one should be my second best straw hat, my winter straw hat. And hang it! We had tenants.

So I put it away in the "reserved" cupboard.

Later I remembered that I hardly ever used a straw hat, only for garden parties to which I never go. It occurred to me that it would be a wicked extravagance to buy a new straw hat when the

hot weather should come, considering that I already had one. I might be asked to a garden party during the summer and I knew that if I had nothing but that straw hat, now in the "reserved" cupboard, I could not possibly go.

So I pulled all the things out of the "reserved" cupboard and found my straw hat and packed it.

Now we were packing for:

(*a*) The donkey-tour;

(*b*) Our summer in Wiltshire.

And this was a very complicated packing.

It was so complicated that I packed the straw hat for the donkey-tour, which was absurd.

Next day in the street I saw a man with a red moustache in a straw hat and he looked so detestable that I vowed I would never wear a straw hat again. I would now burn my straw hat, to make sure. So I rushed home and unpacked all the things that I had packed for our summer in Wiltshire, and, not finding the straw hat, supposed that I was mistaken in believing that I had packed it, and went and pulled out all the things from the "reserved" cupboard, when, again not finding the straw hat, I was obliged to unpack all the things I had packed for the donkey-tour and at last found it and burnt it. So that was done.

Then I put away in the "reserved" cupboard all the things which I had unpacked from the boxes which were to go to Wiltshire and packed in those boxes all the things which were to be taken on the donkey-tour together with half of the things which were to be left in the "reserved" cupboard, and I filled the green canvas sausage,

which was to accompany us on the donkey-tour, with those old clothes of mine which were to be offered to the poor (I forgot to mention this head of our arrangements) for their doubtful acceptance. Then I discovered what I had done and bleated for my wife who came and put everything right again and told me what a help I was.

This pleased me so much that I began a new novel instantly.

Also, during these wild days, I accompanied my wife in her buying of the great number of things which our tenants demanded of us before they would consent to inhabit our house. I made helpful suggestions to which she always listened. I also went to see the agents several times a day to tell them the best way of doing their own business. And I had some trout-flies to buy.

There was also the matter of the green mackintoshes into which I cannot at present go.

. . . . . .

Early in all these alarums and excursions came a postcard from Miss Ellen. A second ass was bought. He was warranted not to lie down in front of motor-cars. His name was Jack. It is to be noticed that Miss Ellen said nothing of his appearance. Evidently he was so lovely an ass that her vocabulary of compliments was unequal to the task of his description.

I was much too busy to begin a novel either that day or the following, because I was clearing out one side of Victoria, the enormous sideboard-chest-of-drawers which I keep stuffed with all my re-

jected manuscripts. For some reason, which is not now apparent to me, I felt the necessity of sorting those papers at this time. It was an opportunity, I thought, which I would be mad to neglect.

Soon I knew that I had been stark mad to take it; but, setting my teeth, I stuck to the horrible task like a man, and ultimately finished it. The whole monument of mistaken endeavour was arranged neatly within the drawers of one side of Victoria, the plays by themselves, the Musical comedies by themselves, the lyrics by themselves, the beginnings of novels in one drawer, the short stories which will never be finished in another, the Humorous Topical Articles concerning matters which have been dead for years in another, below these the chaos of letters and accounts relative to a trusteeship, elsewhere the manuscripts of published work which are kept that they may be a gold-mine for my heirs.

I could rest from my labours. I could ask myself, for instance, why I had not had a bonfire.

And I could tell myself, over and over again, that the ass was bought, that the ass was at Brook, that the meadow of Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie positively contained the ass.

VI. *Of the Beginning of the Tour.*

We found it a great advantage to have our beast of draught waiting for us at Brook because thus we were saved the labour of deciding whence we should set out upon our tour. I suppose that, but for this, we could have spent several days reviewing the comparative merits as points of departure of all the other Forest villages. But the matter was settled for us. Where the ass was, thence obviously we must go forth, because there was nobody to take the ass to any other spot where we might wish to meet him.

Many people who propose such journeys to themselves are foolish enough to prepare a route, a time-table, a programme, making themselves slaves to a list of names and dates. The pith of the matter is not in such people for, if anything, freedom is of the essence of the unfettered life. To move on at the dull bidding of a schedule when one's mood is reposeful, to go to Dan though one's desire be towards Beersheba, to turn to the right when one feels inclined to be enticed to the left, these and similar examples of regular conduct are not suitable for vagabonds.

With the determination, then, to begin our voyage at Brook and with the hope that we should

end it at the same spot, our programme was complete. We saw clearly that Brook was the properest place for departure, and after that all was as Heaven should send it until the passing of the days should once again confront us with the ass's meadow.

And to Brook we went, via Waterloo and Totton stations, on a choice day of Spring weather, with the green canvas sausage crammed to bursting and our new green mackintoshes (about which I am to tell you in their place) and the tea-basket and *Sangre y Arena* for my wife to read and many Whatman boards for me to spoil and glad hearts and extraordinary anticipations and several other things.

We have now begun, not the tour but the book, which is an account of it. The tour will begin in a moment.

Over most of the journey from Totton to Brook I need not linger. The Forest is not yet. The road runs level and straight through fields with here and there plantations of young oaks and here and there a modern ugly villa or a squalid little public-house. Totton is altogether abominable and to be left behind with all speed, and for several miles one may study the Forest map (feasting one's eyes on the names of unknown and beautiful places) without missing much more than a few advertisements of petrol. The Forest is not yet. But just before Cadnam the map may be put away. One scents The Trees from hereabouts and as one comes out of Cadnam there they are. Here part three of the four great Forest roads,—the Lynd-

hurst–Brockenhurst–Lymington Road, that runs due South to the Sea; the Ringwood Road that carries you across the Avon Valley into Dorset; and the Fordingbridge Road that mounts the highest country in the Forest, gives you some of the rarest views and splits by Picket Corner northwards to Downton and to Salisbury. As you pass *The Sir John Barleycorn* you can see a real forest picture, two great beech woods leaning together and between—the Ringwood highway, two white miles of it, swinging upwards to the trees of Castle Malwood. But our business lies straight on, and in a moment we are looking among hollies into the blue heart of Bignell Wood where the gipsies camp by the pools of rain water and the brook of Brook wanders at its will among the grey old trees.

And now we have crossed the brook of Brook and now we are passing the meadow of Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie.

At this point the tour may be said properly to begin.

"Look!" said my wife, pointing.

I looked and lo! a slim grey shape with long ears and a white nose, which stood motionless and thoughtful in the middle of the field. It was the ass. Billy, that fat pony, may or may not have been there. We saw no Billy. We saw but the ass, the donkey of our desires, the companion-to-be of marvellous travels, the long-sought locomotive power, the linch-pin of our projects—the ass.

We hailed him, we waved handkerchiefs to him. He ignored us. Methought he moved one ear but

my wife thought not. In any case he made no glad start in our direction such as would have been seemly and gratifying. We believe that he thought he knew what he was in for. He had overheard the conversation of Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie. He understood that he was to be delivered up to a month's labour on the morrow. To-morrow would be quite soon enough for making our acquaintance. For to-night, he feigned to be unaware of our existence. But his ears could not help drooping.

Poor ass! He must have spent a bad night. Work, throughout his life, had been for him an affair of many savage blows. Bad usage had warped his conceptions of work as a pleasure. Bitterly he thought of the morrow. I have no doubt he ate his hay that night, for he has never been known to refuse his victuals; but he must have forced himself to eat. He did not know. He did not know. Had he come to the gate at our call I think he would have slept easily enough. I fancy he would have taken our measure even with a gate between.

VII. *Of the Rivers of the Forest and particularly of the brook of Brook.*

Brook lies on the Northern edge of the Forest just where the Southampton–Fordingbridge Road begins definitely to climb towards the highlands of Bramble Hill Walk and Longcross Plain. Here the road crosses one of those few tiny streams which meander about in the Forest as if they have lost their way among all these trees and are too shy to ask it. In this matter of running water the district is indeed sadly to seek. There is nothing anywhere that you can call a river. But when one remembers the Avon and the Test, one refuses to do anything which seems like complaint. In sheer gratitude for the Avon and the Test one passes by the dearth of streams in that small stretch of country which separates the two sweetest rivers of England. One cannot have everything. And one has the trees.

And the trickles of the Forest are charming little trickles and often surprise one pleasantly with the scent of bog-myrtle as one dips down suddenly from two miles of thirsty heather. And in the Spring these small valleys are all glorious with the orange of that same dear plant, and the blue eyes of forget-me-nots look up as one passes

by and the primroses are everywhere. Yes, small though these mercies are, one is very thankful for them. For there is nothing which is so necessary to the enjoyment of a countryside as running water.

The Beaulieu River, which, in this connection, is the pride and glory of the Forest, is barely to be noticed. You could jump it anywhere with a pole, I fancy. And the Lymington River is not even so important. These are the two grand arteries of the Forest. But bigness is not everything. If you have the right eyes you can see a Torridge in the smallest beck that ever tinkled between Yorkshire cliffs, and no little gill of Sussex but shall provide your fancy with a Sandford lasher. The mighty elms that brood over those two noble rivers, East of us and West, can throw no sweeter shade than a bunch of broad dock-leaves, drooping from the edge of a foot-high cliff. It is your own fault if you can get no more of yourself under it than your eyesight. You shouldn't be so big. An elf sits there on a pebble, cool and comfortable, mocking you, his chin just out of water.

And if you can be persuaded to desert the donkey and take one of these little streams for a guide, to what joys may it not lead you ! It goes where the deer go. I suggest that some day, when you get to Brockenhurst, you set out from Balmerlawn and, plunging into the woods under the notice-boards which unblushingly threaten penalties to trespassers, follow the Highland Water North-eastwards, through the Queen's Bower and so on

through Holmhill, through all high Bolderwood, till you lose it in the top of Ocknell and emerge from those great woods, with a shout, upon the plain of Stony Cross, whence is a mighty prospect Eastwards and where is the Compton Arms which will feed you well, though not cheaply. I advise sandwiches under a holly. Then turn round, find the head of the Highland Water again (if you can) and follow it back to Balmerlawn through perfectly new scenery. You will have walked twenty miles and there isn't another twenty miles like it in the world.

Yes, the Forest streams are kindly guides, though you must have a care of bogs. When you're in their company, you must never allow the Forest to persuade you into forgetting your own confounded ponderousness. It will never do to be swallowed up. But this will not often happen if you keep an eye to the going. And the streams will do their best to warn you. You mustn't blame them because you weigh twelve stone six. If you are willing to remember this you will not regret accepting their guidance.

I think the Brook stream is as pleasant a little thing as any of them. I will tell you in a moment how I tracked it to its lair in Bramble Hill, but just now I want to give you the way to find it where it goes through the beeches towards Cadnam. You might miss this part of its journey and that would be a pity.

Starting with your back to the Green Dragon and your face to Southampton, you cross the bridge and walk (or drive the donkey-cart) a

hundred yards or more till a lane goes away to the right, just past the carriage-gates. This is a lane to see which it is worth coming all the way you have come—however far that may be. It will lead you across two streamlets and the Lord send you sunlight to shine through the firs on to the bracken, green or dead. You now come out upon a lawn where are cottages (called Canterton) and a smart little red house and beyond is Bignell Wood. And you could spend your life in Brook and never see enough of Bignell Wood, unless you should happen to be lost there on a rainy November evening.

Round by the cottages is the path to the Rufus Stone, if you are interested in Rufus Stones. Some day you must take that path, but it is not really necessary to go to the Rufus Stone at all. And, by the way, it is not a Stone, though that makes it no more interesting. You must take this path because it leads you through beeches. I often wonder if it is possible to see too many beeches.

So instead of going to the Rufus Stone I advise your following the green track—it soon becomes stony—to the left, as near as possible to the fence which guards private property, and here you must be particularly careful to keep to the track, or else you may get into trouble. So don't go through the gate in the fence but keep on down the hill and you will find the brook of Brook on the other side of a turf wall. You will see it through the beech stems.

If the water is low it will be clear brown, running

shallow over golden gravel or lying, still and dark, below high banks all fringed with fern. At places you can hardly find it for the growth of bushes, but it always emerges and goes on singing softly to itself. That is a regular forest track you have just left. I have met a butcher's cart in it, but generally it is quite deserted, save for a few tinkling cows or an odd pony coming down for a drink or an old sow and her litter nosing in the mast. You and your wife can sit by the hour on the moss, with the sun on your back and the stream at your feet, with never a silly soul to wonder why you find it unnecessary to converse. And if you want a little exercise and it is August, you have only to cross the brook and find the falling meadow that lies beyond the hedge and you will be rewarded by seeing innumerable peacock butterflies floating above an acre of lilac scabious. Then you can come back and sit down by the water.

Perhaps you will see a water-vole and it may hap that a trout shall rise (though I have never had the luck to see anything so glorious in all the Forest). Such things are marvellous events to persons properly constituted, whom the fate of Empires does not concern in any way when they are in the Forest. If you can at all feed your soul with the peace of the woodland and the play of strong light through leaves upon calm pools of amber water, if the call of the green woodpecker, the cackle of the cock pheasant, and the chatter of a squirrel are sounds delectable to your ear, if the strong red flight of a fritillary (for blackberries

grow down yonder, across the water) is to you a thing to be followed with rapture until the trees hide it, why then ! this is a place for you to visit. You may tether the ass anywhere. It's all free as air.

And though no trout gladden you by rising, know that the water you see is flowing to join that blessed stream which has passed through the gills of the great fishes of Houghton.

And now let us go up-stream and see how the brook of Brook begins its journey.

I made its acquaintance in its upper waters on an August evening during our Caravan Tour ; and because my wife does not love rough walking I did this alone. Had she been with me I should not have been terrified, as I was.

When I left the high-road I was in a cheerful, almost boisterous frame of mind. The evening was so warm, so glowing, and the light breeze that I had encountered on the Common was so sweet with odours that my soul was greatly uplifted and shyness of the golf-players alone kept me from loud song. But I thought " In the wood I will sing. The trees will not laugh at me." This I said because I knew nothing about it.

I took a faint path which lay down the middle of a long green glade, and as I walked an influence came out of the Forest and accompanied me. Here the breeze was not and nothing seemed to move but myself. The sun caught a tree-top here and there, but all else that my eye could see was steeped in blue shadow. A great silence enveloped me. My feet roused no challenge

from the turf, as I advanced along this dusky immanent avenue.

After a time two giants stood in my way forbidding me to enter. I took a hold of myself and drove my feet forward. Here it was much darker. As I laid chin on shoulder—to assure myself that I was well alone—Reason, that time-server, fled and I saw the trunks all hurrying in behind me to shut out my view of the common and its comfortable men. It was as if the trees hungered to absorb me, to snatch me suddenly in among them that my poor blood and bones might the sooner fertilise their ancient soil. As I shook free of them for a moment upon a broad lawn, I actually halted and listened to hear them moving upon me from all sides. But they were clever and stood still. There was one particularly evil-looking little holly that I could have declared swayed, not ten yards from me, with the jar of its sudden halt. And a whole sky-line of beeches trembled with desire for my phosphates.

Reason, from a safe distance, called her dutiful encouragements: "This is nonsense!" So it was. I blessed her and she came crawling to me. I said aloud, "I will not be intimidated by trees," and in a fit of the maddest bravado I whooped. The result was less satisfactory than I had expected. I could hear the trees laughing all around me. They puffed derision upon me. They blew out the match I had struck so that I might inhale tobacco and be normal again.

"Damn the wind!" I said and with the words I was normal.

I had so often damned the wind when I had been in perfectly unfrightful places that (I suppose by the force of association) this ogre wood became suddenly innocent as the top of an omnibus. Reason danced back like a naughty terrier that does not know if its crime has been observed. I gave her welcome, for I had need of her, and we went on together.

Around the lawn, where I was, the trees stood like a wall. Those to the West flung their shadows towards its middle, those to the East were glorified with golden light. Chin high, the clumps of bracken encumbered the floor of this great forest room, whose ceiling was deep blue flecked with a mackerel of pink. No wind now—Reason was with me, remember—stirred about me ; that puff had been the day's last sigh ; and as I crossed the glade every leaf, save those of the aspens, seemed to wait tolerantly upon my departure. This place, you must know, was this very same Beeches' Theatre where you and I are now sitting smoking, and for the first time I was experiencing that sensation of which I have told you, of having intruded upon the preparations for some mysterious event. It was too strange for me, then, to let me linger to taste it.

I had the choice of two paths. One crossed the clearing and engaged itself among trunks where a brightness in the wood told me I should find another glade. The second ascended to the left and vanished into total gloom beneath a broad arch made by two beeches with their lowermost limbs. Something in that black cave might or

might not be watching me. I sped along the first path, Reason racing ahead. I found her seated on a great log. And here I got a light!

A little river was before me, a trickle, a drop of a stream—the brook of Brook, though I did not know it. Singing its small song, it professed itself my very good friend. I too had thought to sing in the wood but I listened rather now to the other's voice.

Eased by its artless companionship I burned one cigarette to the wood-gods with whom I was now upon the best of terms. The stream gave me its assurance that I was accepted by the forest. Lest, however, that assurance be forgotten and the trees again unman me, I clung, when I got on my way, to my brook. It amused itself by leading me a pretty dance. Its head was my objective. The undiscovered source of running water lays a spell upon the imagination, a spell that grows stronger the higher up-stream one goes. I can regard the Thames at Westminster without a thought of his origin. He is so large, so mercantile, so civilized that somehow one never thinks of him issuing bubble by bubble from some tiny, remote hole in the ground among those old Western hills. But join him at Oxford, row by Eynsham and New Bridge, Lechlade and Kelmscott, and as he narrows so does your interest in his beginnings expand. At every corner it becomes more and more possible that as you turn it you may see the wonder, the visible birth of that weakly infant (barely fit to turn the wheel of some fairy miller) who in his few days' life takes great London on his back.

So as my fellow-traveller and I doubled and twisted up and up through the fern and heather our excitement laid hold of us and urged us on. It was as if we entertained ourselves with a game of hide-and-seek. The streamlet played a thousand jests upon me; a thousand times I was tricked. Here was the place, this black brimming cup under the hazel roots with one white flower afloat; or it was here, this patch of green bog, spread sopping and pitted by hooves (each mark a puddle) among the hollies. But the stream still climbed and chuckled at my disappointments. I persisted doggedly, while all the wood about me darkened and darkened. For now I was breasting the great ridge that splits the timber country with its bare heaths, a day's march East and West, and the high land hung directly between me and the sunset and here the trees stood very close and tall.

Now the stream escaped me among impenetrable cover and because it had come upon me that I must quickly see a great expanse of sky, I bade my guide farewell and a pleasant journey and struck directly for the summit. In a few moments I saw the trees give way before me, the glory of the upper air scattered among their stems, and then I was in the heather, pressing upwards, eager for the spectacle.

As my head came level with the plain I found one long purple island that swam amid the blaze of fire upon a sea of clear yellow. A few small rosy consorts hung in its neighbourhood and this was the sunset. But when I turned about and looked Eastwards, I saw a whole forest bathed in mellow

light, fold on fold of tree-tops reaching away to a strip of shining water. And beyond all there was an undulating blue mystery that I still try to believe was the Hills of Beulah and not the Isle of Wight.

The sun sank below that long low cloud and my shadow was projected ten miles long upon the woods and, with its head, touched Netley Hospital.

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VIII. *Of a Songster.*

Brook. *April 7th.*

To-day, waking at dawn, I heard the characteristic and rarely sweet song of the Lesser Bushmullet, and peering cautiously out of the window I descried the sober little fellow not two yards away from my eyes, perched jauntily on a spray of Oracaria. His little throat throbbed as, intoxicated with the rapture of the Spring, he poured out his soul in a flood of delicious melody.

"Tuck, tuck!" he sang on A♯ and again "Tuck, tuck!" and once more.

I threw a piece of soap at him and he flew away Then I slept again.

. . . . . .

The above is a quotation from my journal. offer it to you in deference to custom, which decrees that, in books of this character, extracts from the author's diary shall be given here and there. There will be no more such extracts, for there is no more journal. I think it better to let you have the whole of it than to risk, by selection, the omission of anything important.

IX. *Of the Power of the Ass and of his Sloth, and of a Drive to No Man's Land and so by Way of Piper's Weight to Stony Cross and Home again.*

Our sojourn in Brook was not to be a long one because we were bent on exploration and we knew the Brook country almost backwards. We proposed only a two or three days with Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie, two or three days in which trial of the ass should be made, his acquaintance formed, and some knowledge gleaned of his capacities, his idiosyncrasies and his vices, if he had any. This done it was to be hey! for the greenwood and ho! for the free life and ha! for anything else that should come our way. Even ha ha! for it. For our mood was anything but serious.

These Brook days were to be the preface to our tour. I perceive that the thing has not even yet got begun. But you undertook to go slowly—or did I? Well, I shall. I desire the company of no hustler. Go hire a motor-car! We travel my pace, which is my wife's.

Will you still be going?

Nay then, here is a bit of a drive for you. Do it at your own speed; walk it if you will; but do it, in God's name. Don't leave Brook without

doing it. You cannot be so wicked. And when you get back to the Boarding Cottage, sit awhile in the garden with a pot of tea at your elbow, and a box of The Cigarettes (I will leave them on the mantelpiece in the drawing-room) near by, and think it over. Then walk round the kennels and scratch all the bulldogs' ears (there are generally seven bulldogs in the garden of the Boarding Cottage and very often there are puppies) and think it over some more. Think about that which you have seen. I'm sure you will not want to leave the Forest. And when my wife and I jog in behind the donkey, hours after you, come out to the gate and tell us that you are not going back to London.

. . . . . .

Though we knew Brook intimately there was still one place on the map of the neighbourhood which we had not visited and it was called—inviting name!—No Man's Land. The search for such a spot could not well fail in interest. On our trial drive, therefore, we resolved to visit No Man's Land. It was rather disappointing to find a well-marked red line leading straight to it, on the map, from the Salisbury Road. One felt that the path thither should have been indicated less definitely, by parallel lines of dots, for instance. But the Ordnance Survey has no poetry in its composition.

About ten o'clock, then, of a certain historic morning, we, having breakfasted enormously, collected our various necessaries, our cushions, our rugs, our parasols, our Spanish novels, our notebooks, our dictionary and other soporifics,

our paints, our palettes, our brushes, our Whatman boards, our sponges, our campstools, our water-bottles, our tin cups, our charcoal, our indiarubbers and other weapons of offence, our matches, our Cigarettes, our luncheon-basket, our map, our scissors (for clipping off the split ends of hairs when Spanish becomes too exciting), our manicure tools, our half lemon, our green mackintoshes (I am coming to them), our field-glasses (for watching things through), without all of which we never set forth upon a donkey-drive. Then we sat down to wait for the ass and the cart.

George (the hot-water boy) had been sent to the meadow for the former. The latter rested, shafts to earth, beside the garden fence.

With Miss Ellen we talked of this and that.

Suddenly down the road came the ass, hell-for-leather, ears erect, nostrils distended. George (a tiny boy) followed, his length parallel with the ground and some four feet above it. They were connected by the ass's neck-rope, upon which George maintained a valiant or a despairing clutch. Past us went this group of racing donkey and flying child and vanished in a cloud of dust in the direction of the Bell. Recently Jack III had stabled at the Bell. He was after the oats of the Bell.

This was our first glimpse of Jack in action.

I said, "He seems vigorous enough"; and I thought, "Suppose he did that with me."

My wife was in the road, running and exclaiming that George would be killed. Miss Ellen, who has every confidence in George, went in to begin her day's cooking.

She had hardly disappeared before the ass was coming back, his ears modestly disposed, his tail pendent. Having dashed into the yard of the Bell, having asserted himself, he had suddenly grown meek (as he sometimes does), submitted to the bridle and stopped his nonsense. Indeed, I have never known a beast more tractable once the bit is in his mouth, or more naughty of a morning before the badge of slavery is upon him. I have stood by for ten minutes at a time, applauding with both hands, while I have watched three strong people labour to bit this small but terrible creature. It has raised me vastly in my own estimation to think that I drive a beast like that.

We had now an opportunity of examining our steed.

At the first sight I understood why Miss Ellen had spared her ink instead of writing about his looks. Here, in truth, was a thin little fellow to drag us over the surface of the earth. Recently he had been clipped, and you have probably no idea how it misbecomes a donkey to have his shockiness abated to any serious degree. With all his hair on he looks small enough, but the rough pelt gives the impression of strength. He looks little, but sturdy. Take his coat away, and where is he? Now suppose you shaved a Chinchilla—or suppose you stripped a motorist.

Jack, then, had the light appearance of a greyhound that has fasted for several years. If they sold donkeys by weight he would have been a cheap purchase.

He was all grey—the precise colour of reindeer-

skin gloves just before you throw them away—save for his nose, which was white. His ears alone were bushy. They looked like two turks'-heads above a clothes-horse.

His tail, tucked now meekly between his legs, had been cut in a very odd pattern. A narrow region of hair had been removed just below the fleshy point. This made a curious dividing space between two long *favoris* which grew from higher up and swept the hocks of this ass. He had been exceptionally unfortunate in his barber. I must tell him about my Bond Street establishment.

All over his back grew little tufts the size of a shilling, the hair on them about an eighth of an inch longer than that which surrounded them. He was like something in a dream.

Ere we had quite feasted our eyes upon his attractions he had been induced between the shafts, and now stood munching corn, offered by George. Corn, then, is the diet of asses. I must make a note of this, for it is my intention to become an expert ass-driver before a month is past.

My heart smote me as I loaded the governess-cart with our many possessions. I could hardly believe that this frail minimus was to draw real luggage after him. Then I thought of the recent exhibition, the horizontal George, the snorting nostrils of this donkey. And I added another Whatman board.

While I was doing this I noticed that George's coat was also of the diet of asses. George was half-way down the beast's throat before I could run round and intervene. But we saved the boy.

This was not vice but a curious appetite.

At length we were in. All kinds of baskets and satchels and rolled-up coats in straps hung about the exterior of the cart. The White Knight would have been pleased with us. I gave Jack the word and we trotted away. For fifty yards it was most exhilarating. Then came the bridge over the brook of Brook, a bare undulation in the road, and we walked. I raised my club.

"Poor little thing," said my wife, "it's up hill here. Don't hit him."

Methought the ears of Jack were keenly cocked. I now know (though I didn't see it) that as I laid down the club, he nodded his head and said vulgarly enough, "This is *all* right, this is." His privilege to walk up hills was established. The matter was fixed in his mind. We might change ours about it; Jack never.

We topped the bridge. I chucked him up and he was so obliging as to trot to the bottom of the imperceptible descent. Then came an undeniable upward grade and he walked—according to custom. For the next two miles the road rises gently. In two places it went downwards. On two occasions, therefore, I saw him jogging slightly, as if he trotted. He reminded me of those pantomime comedians who run furiously upon one spot. Only his running was not furious. I suppose it was the bit tamed him so.

Through Bramshaw we went, on past Bramshaw's little ugly church and so, under those fair young beeches that are the outposts of the great Bramshaw Wood, on towards the open window

through which the road runs over Landford Common to Salisbury and Bath and Bristol and America. But we were going to No Man's Land and turned to the left up the hill.

It would be possible to give a very startling account of No Man's Land were I other than a truthful fellow. I could tell you how we first came upon a group of Tom Noddies busily calculating the day when the Greek Kalends might be expected to arrive; how we met Chucks the Marine going for a swim in Piggott's Bay; how we found John Doe and Richard Roe conversing in the tavern kept by Mrs. Harris; how we met Captain Nemo, in farmer's weather, seeking midday at fourteen o'clock, and how pleased we were to observe that neither Neminis nor Nemine was with him; how we visited the sand-rope manufactory and admired the dexterity of the men of straw who are the employés; how we went into a sweet-shop for peppermints and found a little unborn child asking the shopman in beautiful Maeterlinckian language for "a pennorth of what you don't keep wrapped up in what you haven't got." And I could tell you of the flocks of cocqcigrues we saw.

Instead I chronicle the discovery of the ugliest possible little village, straggling along a green, placed high among beech-woods and commanding a noble prospect Northwards. Only for the views is No Man's Land worth your trouble. The little inn will welcome you and send tea out to you under the trees on the green, but you would not go all that way for a cup of tea. For the view, however, you may go and gladly.

And now, here is a stiff hill to try the ass's metal and yours if you have any humanity in you. Shove, brother, shove even unto Piper's Weight and—there you are, on the top of everything and all Hampshire to look at as you travel onwards over Longcross Plain. If the wind sits right you can see clear beyond Salisbury and far into Dorset behind the Avon. Piper's Weight is a goodly spot and it is air you breathe up there and no mistake. Fill your lungs with it, there is plenty and to spare. And motors are rare birds about Longcross and Fritham.

And now the ass is through the worst of his task. It's all level for four miles to come, through Fritham to the Ringwood Road and past the Compton Arms at Stony Cross to the steep drop upon Rufus Stone. You have gone round the edge of the Forest's top and if you haven't blessed Heaven for the privilege it is because you have done it in a thick drizzle and with a sore toe. Secure a fine day, as we did ; thus shall you come home with praises on your lips The donkey, having done his nine miles, may be less enthusiastic. He will not care about that Forest track from Rufus Stone to Brook. Go by the road.

But I forgot. You were walking. It is we that have the donkey.

Then by all means take the Forest. Find the fence behind the Sir Walter Tyrrell, keep it on your left hand and you won't go far wrong. The fence will take you to Canterton, and you know the way from Canterton to Brook already—or rather from Brook to Canterton.

X. *Of the Second Day.*

On our second day at Brook we gave the ass a rest, for the morrow was fixed for the Setting Out. On the morrow the green sausage was to take its place in the cart, and Jack would be expected to do some work for his living. Let him collect himself against that journey.

We only required of him the short walk to the Beeches' Theatre.

Again the sun was with us. The hawthorns alone showed young green here and there. The flowered blackthorns were as if veils of the most delicate lace had been spread upon the bushes, dryads' wedding-veils perhaps. (No, it is indecent to imagine a dryad in a lace veil and it is immoral to suggest that she would have a wedding.)

Elsewhere the woods were red-brown, purple, grey, not a bud had burst. But the eyelids of the Forest were fluttering.

And I—I set to work with vandal paint and brushes to catch her in the act of awakening. My wife read about Blood and Sand. Thus does mankind declare its superiority to Nature. But we had a happy day, so what matter ?

We can now begin the tour.

XI. *Of My so-called Painting.*

I HAVE not said very much hitherto about my painting propensity. The truth is I am less fond of the subject than I used to be.

Two short years ago I talked of nothing else and could never rest until visitors had asked to see my sketches. If they didn't do it within ten minutes of their arrival, I used to go and fetch the things and make them. Their complimentary or at least non-committal expressions were music in my ears. I could never have enough of them and very often I would show them those pictures all over again.

It is well to be grown up and have an establishment of one's own. I remember how dreadfully I used to suffer as the interest which my father's guests used to feign in my collection of postage-stamps faded away into indifference, into the scamping of pages, and finally, in the second volume, into absolute neglect of whole countries and conversation with my sisters. I don't believe I ever got one of those people so far as Australasia. But now things are different with me. These, my friends and guests, having tasted of my hospitality, are quite at my mercy. They cannot turn away from my trees

and barns and whatnot and talk servants with my wife. She won't let them. She is as determined as I can possibly be that my pictures shall be honestly regarded. You would as soon find a mother willing to spare her visitors the recitations of her little child.

But lately I have been less eager to step forward with my coloured boards. My wife's encouragement has never faltered—don't think that. It is that a conviction has been steadily growing within me that these paintings are not all that I have supposed. I now realize that I paint very badly indeed, that it is better to burn these pictures than to force them on the acceptance of my friends. (Ah! and I have done that too.) No longer do I place a chair and set up the poor daubs one after another in the best light. I seek rather the obscurer corners of the room for my exhibitions. No longer can I take any pleasure in my results and, still worse, I cannot any longer believe that my visitors do. They are still polite—no one has actually insulted me—but I see through them as I wish I had never learned to do. I cannot now imagine them going away down the road, their mouths completely filled with the exchange of admiring observations concerning that which I have shown them. It seems to me that they only wait to turn the corner before breaking out into a competition of raillery. They must.

Yet I go on painting. I cannot stop it. The thing has become a vice with me.

And I go on showing my pictures—those at least which I do not put in the fire—to my friends.

I despise myself, but still I do it. I cannot help it. I must have their praises, though these sound hollow in my ears. I can do nothing without praise and I must paint. I am a horrible example of the man who would not let well alone. I cannot now sit and worship this lovely world without being forced to blaspheme against it on paper.

If I could only have stayed in my happy ignorance!

But the penalty laid upon the dabbling painter is that he shall advance in knowledge and in power stand still. It is a heavy penalty but it does not by any means fit the crime.

To-day, for example, consider my experience before these budded beeches.

Two years ago I should have drawn every tree separately and painted them all simply enough with Light Red. The shadows I should have put in with Prussian Blue and the thing would have been done. And I should have been enchanted with it, and my wife would have patted me on the back, and then I should have been really pleased; for in those days we were able to make believe that I painted beautifully. But it takes two to play a game of that kind and my wife cannot do it alone.

So, now, when I had done my worst in front of those beeches and brought it to her in the donkey-cart, I came with a lagging step and a hanging head. No longer was it mine to bound to her side, the light of creation in my eye, the outrage concealed behind my back lest she should catch any glimpse of it before it should be advantageously placed. I knew that I deserved no applause and

that, because I knew it, there would be very little for me. Yet I came for what I could get, and she gave me more than she should have given. If I could only have pretended that I was proud, she would not have disappointed me. But I knew that everything—tones, values, aerial perspective, drawing, composition—words which I had barely heard two years ago—that everything was wrong, though how wrong I could only guess. And she read the knowledge in my footstep. At length she said, "I like the little stream."

Now, it was a path.

XII. *Of a Friend that We Made.*

I SAID "Let us have tea" and began to busy myself with the unwrapping of packages.

While we ate and drank my wife suddenly cocked her head. "Listen!" she said. "Music!"

"Will you hand me the sandwiches?" I asked.

"No, but," she said, as she obliged me, "listen!" The breeze did indeed seem to bring a soft piping to my ears.

"Some boy," I explained, "with a penny whistle."

"That's no penny whistle," said my wife in a whisper. Her eyes were larger and more beautiful than I had ever seen them.

"What else should it be?" I asked as I filled my mouth with bread and jam. The soft music continued; it was close to us.

"I don't know what it is," she said, "and I'm going to find out."

"Eat your tea," I told her. "What ails you?" I cried after her as she went from me among the beech-boles.

"Don't get lost," I told her. I have a terror of losing her in these woods, for she never has any knowledge of where she is—least of all among trees in Spring-time. She vanished from my eyes.

I got up. "Hang it all!" I said, and taking three sandwiches in my hand I followed her, chewing, for the intellectual effort of my painting had made me hungry. The music grew a little louder, more distinct.

A minute later I caught sight of her again. She stood perfectly still, her hand against a tree-bole, her body leaning forwards. She was poised on tip-toe peering round the trunk. These things told me that she had made a discovery, so I walked as softly as I could. She heard me coming, turned, put a finger to her lips and beckoned me to join her, which I did. I, too, peeped round the tree.

We had left the beech wood and were now among oaks and hollies and other trees. Thus a thick screen was between us and the little lawn into which we stared. It was a delectable little lawn, green as grass, that a trickle of water refreshed, could make it. On the side of it remote from ourselves, under a fine young chestnut, lay a great log, and perched on this log sat a young faun, about the size of a six-year-old child. His little shaggy goat's legs were crossed in front of him, his little brown naked body leant comfortably against the stem of the chestnut, his bright little eyes were lit with enjoyment and on a small pan-pipes he discoursed music for the dancing of five young rabbits. He swayed slightly in time to his melody and the shining points of the hornlets on his forehead (just coming through their velvet) caught the sunlight from time to time. A wreath of pussy-willows was about them.

As for the rabbits, they were clearly intoxicated with melody and their gambols were truly amazing. They had not been many days in the world and I should say that this was their very first experience of the kind. Their dancing lacked all finish but it made up for this by its vigour. They bounded like balls of furry indiarubber. The effect was something that of an eightsome reel, for one leaper was always in the centre of a fast revolving circle. The soloist sprang fifty ways at once ; the circlers laid their ears to their backs and their bellies to the ground and fairly flew. They seemed at times to be nothing but one long round streak of brown and white. Next moment the circle broke, a new soloist, with a squeal, leaped to the centre and the dance proceeded faster than before. It was most exhilarating to watch.

Now neither my wife nor I had ever hitherto come across a faun, and we had always supposed this attractive creature to be extinct in England ; so we were greatly pleased and stared with all our might and kept very still, only nudging one another cautiously to show that nothing of the spectacle was escaping the nudger, and to make sure that everything was seen by the nudged. Our eyes were filled with the faun and the whirling rabbits, our ears with the seductive piping of the faun, our noses with the smell of the Spring, our mouths with suppressed exclamations and our toes with the itch to dance also. This desire we crushed down firmly, for we had no wish to intrude and destroy by our large frightful presences the harmony of the occasion. We knew that these merrymakers

would have no confidence in us at all, and made up our minds, sadly, to pay this penalty for man's agelong tyranny over the lesser animals, his agelong crimes, of civilization and highly developed brain, against the people of the woods.

But what chance at all has the highly developed brain of man against his limited and tiresome body. I became aware that a sneeze threatened me. I exerted all my will; I took that sneeze by the throat and swore that it should strangle, I sweated as I stood with the efforts that I made to destroy that sneeze. In vain. Knowing myself defeated I turned to tip-toe away; blindly I groped in my sleeve for my handkerchief. Too late.

Now, I cannot sneeze softly. Some people can do it like the breaking of a twig; not I. A sneeze of horrible dimensions burst upon the air and, in a breath, the rabbits were gone. Not so, however, the faun. He started, to be sure, and his music ceased. He sprang from his log and stood frozen into an attitude of alarm; only his ears twitched slightly, and the tiny curled-up tail of him quivered against the small of his little brown back. Each moment I expected him to vanish in the undergrowth. Then I heard my wife's voice.

"Please, Faun," she called softly, "don't run away. We're quite harmless and we can't help being humans. So don't run away. Play some more, Faun, won't you?"

He turned at once and stood again looking towards us, half in terror, half in doubt. Between one pose and the next of this faun the eye couldn't

follow him at all. He was " thus " ; he was " so " ; how he became " so " from " thus " there was no seeing.

" Please, Faun," cooed my wife, whereat a smile took the place of his glare and he made three quick steps in our direction.

My wife parted the bush behind which we stood and looked out into the glade. " See," she said, " aren't we harmless ? "

" I rackon '*ee* be," said the faun at once—his accent was rustic in the extreme—" but how 'bout thicky man that's with 'ee ? "

" Oh," said my wife, " he's——" She paid me some compliments which I hope were deserved.

" Let's zee un," said the faun—I too parted the bushes. With his shining little eyes he scrutinized me gravely, for several hours, it seemed. Then he said—

" Well, if '*ee* say so, young woman, rackon I'll risk it."

My bursting bosom relieved itself in a deep sigh of satisfaction. The faun was going to be friends.

" Come out of they hollies, won't 'ee ? " he continued, " and let's have a look at the two of 'ee."

We disclosed ourselves in all our horrid great proportions but he never flinched ; he would have trusted my wife had she been elm-high.

" This," said my wife, " is my husband."

" How's he call hisself then ? " she was asked.

" William," said my wife.

" Ah," said the faun. Then, turning to me, " And how *she* call herself ? " he enquired.

" How do you think ? " I asked him.

"Susan," he said instantly.

"No," I told him.

"Well," he replied, "I be gwine call her so. 'Tis a name I faaaancy."

"Then," said my wife, "I shall call you Charles."

"And *thaz* all right then," said this faun. He sported suddenly into the air, cracked his hooves together and came down again.

"Haven' a bite brad about 'ee, I s'pose?" he observed. "Rackon I could do wi' a bite brad."

"We've some strawberry-jam sandwiches at our cart," said my wife. "Will they do?"

"Aye," he said, "they'll do. Rackoned 'ee'd have some'at of the sort. Most picnickers does. Sometimes they leave 'em behind in a paper. That's where *I* come in."

"This'll be a good neighbourhood for sandwiches?" I asked him. "In summer, eh?"

"Aye," he said, "it's full early for sandwiches yet; but now ee've begun, rackon it'll go on. And how beout *beginning?*"

"Play us to the feast," said my wife. Charles, as he will henceforth be known, immediately put his pan-pipes to his lips, threw out his chest and began a stirring march which I should be glad if I could put down here; but Charles's music has this quality, that however often you hear it you can never remember it. You can't even describe it. It is very stimulating and while one listens one thinks of nothing else in the world, and that is about all there is to say of it.

He put himself at our head—he was evidently accustomed to leading processions—and set off straight for the cart, though I profess that I myself had very little idea of where it was. I suppose he nosed back along the way my wife and I had come. At any rate, in a minute or two Jack's long ears hove in sight.

When we reached the cart Charles went straight to Jack's head, put his hand on the ass's nose and pulled it down ; then he seemed to speak into an ear. Jack listened attentively, once or twice turning his eyes in my direction. Then, all of a sudden our donkey threw up his head and laughed —it was a most extraordinary noise—and with that the conversation ended. Charles gave Jack a friendly punch in the ribs and rejoined us.

"Your friend," he announced pointedly to me, "say as he's got nought agin 'ee, so fur, and when 'ee hits un 'tis only like so much ticklin', he say. Don't mind my askin', Susan, do 'ee ?" he continued, "but cayn't be too careful, eh ?" He turned round about twenty times and threw himself to the grass on his stomach, close beside my wife, who filled his hands with provisions. I am sorry to say that he ate like a beast—or as I generally do—that is, in a thoroughly business-like way. For the moment that was what he was there for.

"This be a zight better'n chestnuts," he observed, while his sharp little white teeth worked away vigorously, "*or* mangle-wuzzle."

We gave him no tea—the vices of our civilization were better withheld from this primitive—but

he had nearly all our food. My wife spoiled him entirely and I forgot to eat, so absorbed was I in the contemplation of our good fortune. There are thousands of people who would give all they have to make such an acquaintance. I will own that it caused us both an extraordinary amount of pleasure to find our faun so much at his ease with us. He seemed to know that we had no designs against his liberty, that no cage need be feared.

"Yet," I thought as I watched him, "for how much money might one not exhibit a live faun up and down the country. He would draw the public even though the *Daily Mail* should refuse him a column of write-up, even though the *Tatler* should ignore him. Surely a faun would excite interest —and on his own merits. Could this age—blasé of miracles though it be—withhold its admiration from such an exhibit? Would it not hush its bellowing voice for once, and halt in its headlong course and ask itself, for once, (as it gazed at the faun) if then everything was quite as simple and easy to be explained as it had supposed, if then the Ancients were quite as foolish as they appeared, if then its own precious realities were quite so certainly not illusions as it believed?"

And then I perceived that our faun would make no more impression upon this generation than a puff of the breeze makes upon the sedges through which it runs. I seemed to read a few headlines —Quaint Survival—the Pithecanthropus Outclassed—Mr. Arthur Machen interviews Present-day Pan—Sir Ray Lankester sceptical—Mr. G. Bernard Shaw's views—Mr. G. K. Chesterton on

same—Mr. John Galsworthy on Messrs. Chesterton and Shaw.

Then I beheld our faun on the stage of the Palace Theatre piping Debussy to the accompaniment of Mr. Finch and his merry men. I could hear the audience comparing his dancing with that of Miss Maud Allan. I could hear them saying how delicious he was. I could hear them declaring that Mr. Butt was an amazing person. Always something original at the Palace! And our faun had rooms at the Savoy.

Then I went on a year or two and saw our faun in a tent at a fair surrounded by gaping yokels and fed on mangle-wuzzle, and glad to get it, and dying at last of a broken heart with his breast tight against the bars of the cage.

Then I realized that I was making myself miserable over nothing, that our faun was by no means in a cage, but here beside us on the grass, free as a bird, bulging with good things and protected from the fate that I had invented, by two thousand solid years of almost universal disbelief in him. Your faun must be seen before he is caught.

. . . . . .

"Charles," my wife was saying, "there are no more sandwiches and the gingerbread's done. I'm so sorry. You see, we didn't know that you would be coming to tea."

"Don't 'ee mind, Susan," he replied. "Never worry, my dear. I done amazing well. So tight as a sapling in Spring I be." He smote himself in front to prove his words. "'Tis this yer

poor William should grieve," he continued, "drameing away and never heeding his victuals. Ho, ho! poor William!"

I was glad that Charles had been satisfied. I had been more than satisfied. I lit a cigarette, but I didn't offer one to Charles. In Tuscany I might have done so for the youth of Italy is notoriously precocious, but not in England. I felt that our English faunlet was still too young for tobacco.

He studied what I was doing, his chin in his hands. "Amazin'!" he said at last, "what things get done, then. 'Ee'd think a man'd have more sense, 'ouldn't 'ee, Susan?"

"To-morrow," said my wife skilfully, "we shall bring far more food."

"To-morrow," he said, not affecting to misunderstand her, "I'll be over Set Thorns way."

"Oh!" she said, "we shan't see you here then?"

"Umpossible," he said sorrowfully. "'Tis a marriage; and how'd they dance without *me?* Only badgers, 'tis, but badgers have their feelings, same's others, and mustn' be disappointed."

"Then the day after to-morrow," she pleaded.

"Nay," he said, "never fret, Susan. I'll seek 'ee out one these fine days. Set off to-morrow; begin thick tower just same's if 'ee'd never known I. Cayn't say, nohow, whan I be back herebouts."

"How do you know we're going to make a tour?" cried my wife.

"P'r'aps Jack, he told I. P'r'aps I guessed," said Charles, winking sagaciously. "P'r'aps I

knawed all 'long, my dear." Suddenly he burst out laughing. "Haw! Haw! They rabbuts!" he cried. "Hornbeams! how they did scuttle, to be sure!" With this he jumped to his hooves, took a little run, leaped and landed on my wife's knees. "Susan," he said as he put his arms round her neck, "I like 'ee well. S'pose I make 'ee my mother, for I never had none."

She hugged him. "It's settled," she said, "come again soon." He put his arms round her neck and gave her a smacking kiss.

"There's a zight mothers," he said, "in this forest, but they're all too busy to take up wi' I. Too many childs they got already. *I* know. *I* watches they houses. No room in there for the likes of I, Susan—what be doin' then?" he demanded.

My wife was tying a pink ribbon round one of his horns. "That's to remember," she said, "not to forget to come and see us soon. See!" she opened her vanity-case and showed him his reflection.

He admired himself awhile. "Sweetly handsome, to be sure," he remarked at last. "Good thing, I be goin' over to Set Thorns by night or I'd never get there for looking into the rivers. But all they old badgers'll die of envy. Thankee, Susan, thankee kindly."

"Who else is coming to the wedding?" asked my wife, but upon this I sneezed. My wife put Charles gently down from her lap and got up. "That's twice," she said, "and the sun's going down. A cinnamon for you and then home." So

we did not hear who else was coming to the wedding at Set Thorns. We began to be busy.

Five minutes later everything was in the cart and we were ready to say good-bye; but where was Charles? A moment ago he had been sitting on a beech root and now he was gone. Nor could we find him anywhere though we hunted and called for some time. But as we drove home along the glade in the coming of the dusk, we heard his pipes more than once, faint and far in the recesses of the woods. It seemed that he guarded us as far as the high-road.

XIII. *Of the Setting Out.*

One does not look for three fine days together in April, but the sun came up smiling for us on the morning of the Setting Out.

Joyous enterprises should always be undertaken in fine weather and old clothes. In the second particular I departed from this good rule. For on the previous evening my new trousers had come from London.

All my life I have wished to wear riding-breeches. No other leg-wear exercises a similar attraction upon my fancy. I envy no Jew his kilt, no Captain of Industry his kerseymeres. I am quite satisfied with common trousers—so long as I cannot wear riding-breeches.

It is not their appearance which takes me. I think them ugly. It is what they stand for—the dominance of horses.

When I see a man in riding-breeches it gives me a feeling of inferiority. "It is possible," I think, "that that man can ride the horse. I cannot do so." This annoys me for I would always feel superior.

Were I an ordinary man I should long ago have bought a pair of these things and gone about feeling superior. But I am so oddly constituted

that I could not be happy in riding-breeches unless I could ride. And I cannot ride—I mean not for more than a minute or two. I should know myself an impostor and that would destroy all the pleasure that is to be derived (I am sure) from the admiring glances of little boys and their nurses. This is what comes of being brought up as a Nonconformist.

Had I been a Roman Catholic I could (perhaps) have obtained a dispensation and swaggered it as bravely as anyone.

Had I been a Christian Scientist I should have demonstrated the non-existence of riding-breeches and dismissed the whole matter from my mind.

Had I been an Anglican I should have moved in good society, learned to ride as a boy and now worn riding-breeches as a matter of course.

Had I been reared in the beliefs of the Esquimaux I should never have heard of riding-breeches.

Had I been brought up as a Free-Thinker I should now do as I pleased.

As a Buddhist I should have avoided the appearance of wishing to straddle one who had haply been my grandam.

As a Shintoist I should have understood the essential hollowness of all things earthly—riding-breeches included.

As a Confucianist I do not know what I should have done. Such speculations lead nowhere.

Whatever I might have done, I dare not wear riding-breeches until I can ride. And I cannot ride.

But I can drive asses. That is something like riding the horse.

So I have got something like a pair of riding-breeches.

I called them fishing trousers to my tailor. I explained that I designed them to go comfortably within waders. I had much to say about the hot discomfort under waders of ordinary flannel trousers tucked into socks. These trousers which I wanted were to be almost tight from the ankle to the knee and then were to swell out into a large looseness. "Something," I said, "like riding-breeches."

These trousers have now reached me and I am enormously pleased with them. They are split (to permit my feet to get through them) for a few inches up the side at the ankle and they are furnished with convenient tapes. They are the very thing to wear under fishing-waders.

With my leathern gaiters buttoned round them (anybody may wear gaiters—the very scavengers do it, gaiters of cardboard), with my leathern gaiters buttoned round them, I say, they look, in the mirror across the length of our bedroom, almost exactly like riding-breeches. They lack those workmanlike little buttons by the knee, but this is not very obvious. To-day my legs look—if not absolutely horsy—most undeniably asinine.

I dare say lots of people will think I can ride horses.

XIV. *Of the Setting Out (second attempt) and of an Italian and of a Trusty Servant and of Lunch.*

We all put on our bravest for the start.

My wife wore the new cherry-coloured silk jersey. Jack had quite fresh artificial sweet peas in his blinkers, one bunch from Miss Ellen and one from Miss Jessie. My legs were marvellous, and as I walked behind the cart I was conscious that all the Boarders were in front of the Boarding Cottage.

It was indeed this fact which determined the line of our departure. One can leave the Boarding Cottage in three directions, up through the village to the left, up a lane which strikes the road immediately in front of the Cottage, or down the Southampton Road. By the first two routes my legs would have been almost at once concealed from the Boarders; by the third I should be under their eyes for several minutes.

I was glad that my wife and the luggage left hardly any room for me in the cart. It was quite natural for me to walk.

I tried to crack my whip.

My wife was waving to the Boarders. I turned and waved too. The cart stopped. When I

looked round Jack was eating grass, and the cart was headed for the ditch. The sound of laughter came down the breeze. I laughed back—over loudly—and dragged the head of our ass into the way it should go.

We turned the corner of the road and lost sight of Miss Ellen's fluttering handkerchief.

I smote Jack twice, two bitter blows, of which I am ashamed. They were intended for the Boarders and they fell on Jack. It comforts me a little to know that he was unaware of them.

Our voyage, however, was begun.

Not till Cadnam did we enter territory that was new to us. Here the Lyndhurst Road invited our steps. We had never been down the Lyndhurst Road and this seemed a good opportunity for doing it.

We did it, singing.

The first person we met on the Lyndhurst Road was an organ-grinder, obviously an Italian. He sat within the shade of a wood on a hill-crest looking down the mile of hot empty road over which we had just come. His attitude was dejected. His elbows were on his knees and his hands hung down in front of his shins. He did not even move his eyes as we passed.. I thought a little music would be good for him. I said, "Musico?" and made motions with my hand suggestive of the turning of a handle. He replied, "Certainly, sir, if you wish it." He did not seem surprised. In the most business-like way he rose and took to his handle. The indifference of an organ-grinder to his own tunes must be, when one thinks of it,

colossal. He would just as soon play his organ as push it. Both are necessary evils. I believe he would have been glad if we had not come by, if he had been left in peace a little longer. Perhaps he was thinking of Sorrento ; perhaps of Risotto ; perhaps some pagan ancestor had awakened within him and worshipped Pan, there, under the beech trees.

That haunting melody, the Anona Two-Step, floated out upon the old silence of these wildernesses.

My wife and I danced upon the Lyndhurst Road. We had a gritty floor, but it was a dance to be remembered. A sulphur butterfly came across the heather to dance against us. The sun danced through the boughs. The world danced that morning.

Jack ate grass.

The music changed to that of " If I should plant a tiny seed of love in the garden of your heart." One can two-step to nearly anything, but not to that. One runs to that—away from it, I ought to say.

Hastily we rewarded our orchestra, wishing him good luck. I tore Jack and the grass asunder and we passed onwards pensively.

Presently a small road beckoned us to the right. It was an alluring road—losing itself quickly among trees. It just told us shyly that it went to Minstead and hid itself as if frightened at its own boldness. We hesitated. The big Lyndhurst Road, confident in its eminent position among the Forest thoroughfares, quite satisfied that everybody knew where it was going, and all about it,

thought it beneath its dignity to remind us. No signboards for it! It assumed that we were going to Lyndhurst, now we were on IT. As for competing with that twopenny Minstead track—no thank you! All the best people went to Lyndhurst, the motorists and the 'untin folk and so forth. As for us, with our tufted donkey, we could do as we pleased.

Well, we knew that. That was what we were there for.

We decided to support this little modest Minstead Road.

We ceased to go to Lyndhurst. The last sight, for that time, which we had of the Lyndhurst Road showed it to us sweeping in a passion down a long hot hill to meet one of its motor-cars. But we were among the trees, safe from that dust.

This little Minstead Road possessed a merit common to most of the roads of the Forest, other, that is to say, than the main highways. I mean it, like its fellows, was thoroughly well metalled. For all over the Forest there live honest beautiful men who come now and again and empty a cart-load of admirable great sharp flints upon the roadside, and then with fair large spades spread the good stuff generously about in all directions. And then they go away, leaving it so.

The main roads on the contrary are always in an intolerable condition, smooth and straight as roads can be. Along them the cars whizz all day revelling in a far vision and the total absence of policemen. But elsewhere they go in fear of their lives.

I have often wished to find some of these benefactors who mend the side roads. I would like to gather them together, as many as should care to come, and feed them with great joints of beef and ale in plenty, and make them a grateful speech and so dismiss them with my blessing on their labours, strengthened in all their great thews for the good work that is especially theirs. But I have never had time to do this. Some day I will.

Now we entered upon a tract of farming land, fields, hedges, long old thatched barns, and other pleasant things. Big cart-horses stared at us over gates; fat cattle became visible; a park, holly-timbered, kept us company for a long way; a squat church appeared on a hill-top. We left it there and came into Minstead. Perhaps we would stay in Minstead; perhaps not.

When we saw the sign of the Inn we pushed on. It was the Winchester Trusty Servant. This is the most abominable of signs. I do not know a more deplorable picture except William Blake's canvas in the National Gallery which represents The Spirit of Pitt subduing Behemoth. Though I make an enemy of every Wykehamist, yet will I say this thing. The Trusty Servant is an invention which lacks design, drawing and wit. It is not even quaint. It is vulgar. It should be abolished. It is one of those things which are admired because they are old. Now nothing is admirable because it is old. Consider half the pictures that hang in National collections. Why are they not burned? Because they are old.

If any monument of bad taste can escape its proper fate for a couple of hundred years, it is safe. It becomes admirable. This is nonsense. Some day everybody will think the Albert Memorial beautiful. This does not bear contemplation.

Because we found the Trusty Servant hanging outside the Inn at Minstead we passed on.

Now all to the West of Minstead the land is a desert for a day's journey; Northwards there is the hotel at Stony Cross but we had no mind to travel where we knew the roads; we would have done better to go back to Brook. There seemed nothing for it but that big populous Lyndhurst from which we had turned away. And towards Lyndhurst we bent our steps.

As soon as we could find a gate with a notice-board over it which told us that trespassers would be prosecuted we turned in there and ate our lunch away from the possibility of road offence. It was very pleasant under the larches, which had their pink tips on. A thread of water trickled among the dead grasses of last year and the sun fell hot on our backs in that sheltered place. Overhead the big white clouds sailed, and low down through the stems, beyond the wood's end, they were banked like a snow field on the edge of an Alpine forest.

We had tea out of a thermos (for we have given up trying to boil water in the open) and chicken legs and egg sandwiches and marmalade sandwiches and sweet apples and Bond Street chocolates. So had Jack. Then we loafed and lazed and wondered where London might be and complimented Jack on his admirable conduct. Indeed,

he had been a good donkey, though he had successfully maintained his right to walk up everything that was not conspicuously downhill.

But we were in no hurry, bless you! We had a month in hand. The slower Jack went the better we liked him; the more we should see for our money. It was now that I conceived my hitherto unpublished sermon "In Praise of Going Slow." That evening I began it, but as it is not yet finished (so slowly does it move) I am unable to bring it here beneath your distinguished notice. But, believe me, it is to sum the matter up finally, for all time.

XV. *Of our Coming to Emery Down.*

However slow one is prepared to go one feels the need of getting to a bed before nightfall. Vagabondage is only a happy state so long as one can avoid sleeping in ditches and under haystacks or the hideous labour of tent-building and cooking food. The flesh, while it offers many goodly joys, imposes certain conditions not to be neglected. It continually restricts one's freedom of inaction, forcing one to get up and find dinner, or to fuss about and cook it. As we prefer almost anything to the pot and pan business it became necessary to leave our resting place under the threatening board near the Minstead–Lyndhurst Road.

Will us nill us, we were driven towards Lyndhurst. The map offered us in any other direction nothing, for miles, but ditches and haystacks, and probably no haystacks.

So towards Lyndhurst we once more set our faces, and Jack's. We saw that it was appointed that we should sleep in Lyndhurst. Clearly we perceived that there is no escaping Destiny. But we should be able to meet the Cadnam–Lyndhurst Road again and show it that we could do without it. We remembered that. The proud

way should learn that the little Minstead Road was also capable of bringing travellers to Lyndhurst.

Twenty minutes later roofs among the trees told us that we neared some settlement of articulate-speaking men. The map said Emery Down. Soon we moved between cottages and suddenly we were descending a sharp little hill on to the Lyndhurst–Ringwood Road and were confronted with a building, of low stature and invitingly odd aspect, which proclaimed itself the New Forest Inn. Over the door a hunting scene, done in oils, presented a sportsman on what could be nothing but a horse (because of the sportsman who bestrode it). Both were gazing wistfully at a stag (we knew it by the antlers) which trotted close to the horizon : I believe there was one hound in full cry. But the sportsman knew better than to join in the chase. Had he done so he would have fallen off.

The New Forest Inn stands beside the Lyndhurst–Ringwood Road, positively embowered in trees. From its windows you can throw into the Forest the biscuit which people usually throw into things in close proximity to which they find themselves. The Lyndhurst–Ringwood Road comes down hill to the Inn through the main street of the village, hurries past with a last quick dive and is lost to sight instantly among great trees. You can hear it calling to you from its tunnel, calling you on to Bolderwood. Such a call may not be disregarded lightly.

Our feet stopped of their own accord and after

a brief pause conducted us within doors. We were quite confident of finding shelter. For what other purpose, save that we should live in it, had this Inn started up so unexpectedly in our path? The hand of Providence had clearly turned us aside to Minstead, had as clearly brought us to Emery Down. Destiny (with which Providence has nothing to do) might have made what arrangements it pleased for lodging us in a stuffy Lyndhurst. To-day we laughed at Destiny.

And it was so. Rooms were exhibited, terms were told.

And here I would warn anyone who should go into the Forest looking for peace and health and adventures that he need not think to do it too cheaply. Remember that you are in a playground, where the accommodation is not abundant. There is no cause for alarm; while they sell you board and bed they will not skin you alive unless you are fool enough to go to the big hotels; but they do not care about giving things away.

The cart was soon unloaded and its contents carried upstairs. Already we panted to walk in those mighty woods into which we had seen the Ringwood Road disappear. The cart, when filled with green sausages and things too numerous to specify, cramps the legs of young women. Exercise was indicated. Jack, then, was led away to stables. This poor good donkey had drawn my wife and all our baggage six mortal miles. He had done stoutly and worked cheerfully. Repose was due to him, and we saw that he got it. We left him munching hay and clad in his little coat of sacking; then

warming ourselves in the glow of our own humanitarianism we sat down to tea in the smallest sitting-room in the world.

And this day we had not met one single motor-car and we had seen king-cups, golden king-cups by a stream where there were catkins hanging.

XVI. *Of the Trees of Emery Down.*

At Emery Down we have reached that great interior system of inclosures which extends from Bolderwood on the West ten miles clear to Beaulieu on the East. The woods to the North of Minstead are dense enough (especially about Bramshaw), but the high lands cut them up a great deal and in size they are nothing at all. Nowhere else in the Forest can you travel so long in one direction among trees. Here too is the region of those oaks which we attempt to dignify by special names, Peter Oak, Eagle Oak, Knightwood Oak. This is the district which people mean when they speak of the New Forest, the part which has made the whole famous.

One is apt to form fantastic expectations concerning these places of which one has constantly heard. Everybody knows the folly of doing this, but nobody seems wise enough to bridle his imagination. It is this propensity of human nature which makes these exhibition spots so often disappointing. The mind of man, being infinitely greedy, contracts an appetite which nothing actual can satisfy. Perhaps Stonehenge suffers more in this way than most places of wide repute. Those who visit it for the first time usually complain that it

is so small. They do this not because Stonehenge is small but because they have expected of it quite outrageous proportions. So with the view from Richmond Hill. People have heard so much about its beauty, it has been "saved" so often and so many letters have been written about it in the newspapers, that when at last we see it we cannot bear the realization that we are contemplating nothing more remarkable than a fat champaign through which a river winds. It's true beauty is all obscured for us by its failure to be something other than it is, something which we expected it to be, though what, we do not know at all.

The traveller therefore does well who, before he enters this part of the Forest, discards his expectations of unimaginable growths. Fine trees there are everywhere, but the Advertisements of the Big Tree Brand Californian Burgundy afford no useful standard by which to measure their greatness. There is not a pine in the Forest which one could tunnel for the traditional coach and four. Less than a hundred people can join hands round the Knightwood Oak. And since the Forest has another side than its wild one, you are to expect to cross many ordered plantations of young oaks and great belts of the commercial fir. For your gigantic great tree does not pay.

Ask then, when you come to Emery Down, only a noble woodland of great extent and you shall have it. And you shall not shrug your shoulders but exult in a fair possession. It is a frame of mind to cultivate. Life tastes sour to so many

people only, I think, because they insist upon its being all sugar; for a greedy expectation gives birth inevitably to disappointment, but a moderate demand shall be marvellously over-paid.

I understand that every American boy looks forward confidently to the day when he shall become the President of the United States. He is madly encouraged to so do by his parents. Forty years later, an old man, he dies of attempting to satisfy this preposterous desire; for only five or six men can become President in a generation. And though these wretched little boys learn to reduce their demands and to aspire only to become Presidents of Railway Companies, still nearly all of them must find that even these modest posts are quite unattainable. Towards the end of their short lives they must condescend to fix their aspirations upon a few dollars' rise of salary. Dyspeptic, wrecked as to the nerves, walking about (to employ their own charming words) to save their funeral expenses, the only time they smile is when they hear their little sons asserting a determination to become President of the United States. And they smile proudly, not cynically. That is the really amazing feature of this dreadful state of affairs. The ambition of these worn-out fathers is not killed, but lives again in their sons.

And these poor souls imagine that they look down upon those sage Asiatics who, knowing the vanity of ambition, gladly practise the simple trade that has come down to them through countless generations, holding that what was good enough

for their grandfathers to the n^{th} is good enough for them. The Americans are all young and the blindness of Youth to the things that are really worth while is upon their eyes. The East knows the stupidity of trying to improve Things in General. It has outlived its hot beliefs and its troubles would all be behind it if the accursed Cosmic Unrest had not broken out elsewhere.

According then as you have the temperament of the East or of the West so shall you find the trees to the South of Emery Down.

And now let us have a look at some of them.

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XVII. *Of Two Drives.*

I

About three miles of the Ringwood Road will take you from Emery Down to the gate into Bolderwood. This gate lies to the left of the road very near the top of the first real hill you meet. Travel until you find this gate, and if you miss it by any chance you will very soon come out on to heather and know that you must turn back. The signboard—one is usually placed at the gates of the inclosures—will tell you when you may turn in. It will ask you to keep to the rides and not to injure the trees—as if you were capable of doing such a thing. Go through this gate and on, till you reach a keeper's cottage; then find his telephone wire and follow it down-hill. It will take you to the Lyndhurst–Christchurch Road by way of Mark Ash and Knightwood.

The Bolderwood Inclosure is chiefly remarkable for its enormous fir trees, Mark Ash for its fantastic beeches and Knightwood for the Knightwood Oak. There is a good gravel road all the way and in wet weather you need not fear this journey. At any time of the year it must be worth making. If your desire is towards monstrous vegetables you may find the Knightwood Oak by turning to

the left just before you reach the third gate and the Christchurch Road. A gate across these Forest roads means generally that you are entering or leaving an Inclosure. Thus, after the first gate along the telephone wire you shall say "We are now at Mark Ash," and not be wrong, though whether you are any the better for the knowledge it is not for me to say. Some people like to know where they are. For others, it is enough if they can say, "Here be gradeley beeches."

Peter Oak we never saw. It is buried in the deepest forest, and without a guide or extraordinary fortune you might wander a week in Mark Ash and never hit it. But the Knightwood Oak you can find without any trouble at all and I would advise you not to scorn it altogether just because it has been labelled and made famous. This is in no wise the Knightwood Oak's fault, for like all trees, except monkey-puzzles, it has a modest soul in its great body and does not value a reputation among men at a halfpenny.

There is a fence round the Knightwood Oak for people to carve their initials on.

I would here eulogise the Knightwood Oak, but who am I to be scribbling about it? It becomes me better to be silent in its presence, which is and will be always with me.

About a mile from the Knightwood Oak on the way home by the Christchurch Road you will find, on the left, in a wide plain, a great timber and plaster house with large gardens and many outbuildings. If you slip round behind this house

and make for the Western end of Lyndhurst Hill —it rises up, heavily wooded, across the high-road you have left—you can go dead North all the way to Emery Down, comfortably through the hollies and beeches. You will hit the Ringwood Road just West of the Lawn at Emery Down. This will save you the gritty journey and heavy collar-work round by the Swan Inn. It is a little exploration that I recommend to you. But don't try it near dusk. This part of the woods is very full of deceitful imps who come out at sunset and delight to turn the traveller right round and souse him into the Highland Water.

II

Here is a more adventurous journey which we made from Emery Down; you must certainly attempt it while you are there. I can't promise you that it will fall out with you exactly as it did with us; but you are sure to be glad to have done it.

We took the Minstead Road and held it till it came out on to the heath beyond the gates of Minstead Manor. Here a track led off a little to the left and went over grass till, turning more sharply to the left, it dropped down a short hill and crossed a trickle of water. Here a hill faced us and this we climbed, turning neither to the right nor to the left. We saw presently the fence of the Highland Water Inclosure on our right. We left the first gate alone, but we went through the next one (there were big beeches on our left hand here) and found a grass track which took us right down into fir plantations.

Then down a great still green street where, every ten paces, a swarm of harmless midges danced its gay sun-dance, careless of the night, we moved for ever so long in our established procession of three. Right and left of us opened the lesser thoroughfares of the tree-town which we were invading, each as solemn, as quiet, as sun-drenched as the one before. Firs, firs and again firs. For a few yards, in among their close stems, golden gleams, red gleams ; beyond lay the shadows and the serried pillars. If a yaffle holloaed it was as much as we heard from the wood people for many minutes at a time. The gentle creaking of the cart, the light dainty tread of the ass's little feet, served only to make the silence audible. We were too much impressed to sing, even to speak. I for one was glad of my company and not wholly on the usual account. The awe of the forest was upon me.

All at once Jack halted. To such an event I was not, as you can understand, altogether unused, nor for it was I ever unprepared. Mechanically I urged him forwards with club and voice, for his dilatory ways have always the power to dispel any sensation from my bosom that at all approaches the poetical. I smote him on the rump and "H-rrr-rrp!" I cried. Having made his protest the good beast resigned himself to his doom, moved forward, sank, plunged, struggled another step onwards and downwards and came to a complete standstill—bogged. The wheels were in it up to the hubs ; Jack to his belly.

"There," I said, "you've done it now"—

which was absurd ; but it is extraordinarily comforting to be able to lay the blame for one's own foolishness on somebody who is incapable of speech. Jack, accustomed no doubt to the illogicalities of mankind, simply laid back his ears despondently, turned his head round and looked at me. I could almost hear him say, "Now, you blighter, you've got me into it and you can damn well get me out of it." But as he didn't say this I went on comfortably abusing him.

"Blundering little fool," I said, for I was very cross. It looked like being a bad business. Heaven only knew how far we were from five or six strong men. "Where's his sagacity ?" I demanded.

"Perhaps," said my wife, "if we unhitch him, he can struggle through by himself. In any case I think I'll get out."

I transferred her to solid ground : then I unhitched the ass and called on him to exert himself. He turned his head backwards, this time on the other side, and grinned at me. I am convinced that he enjoyed the situation, yes, though he should next moment be swallowed up, ears and all, he felt that it would be a good end. He would at any rate be putting me in a hole as well as himself. I appealed to his pride, to his hide ; I reminded him of his instinct of self-preservation ; I told him how silly he looked without any legs. I called him a wallowing porpoise. My voice broke, so earnestly did I harangue this soulless log.

"Perhaps," said my wife, "if we can pull the cart out backwards he can turn round and join us here. The shafts hinder him at present."

I began to try to pull the cart out backwards. I muddied myself inconceivably, legs, hands, arms and face—in vain. I began to address the cart; I told it how I hated and loathed it. A little breeze blew up to see what was the trouble and the woods shuddered to hear my observations. Jack stretched out his nose and nibbled at the surface growth of his death-trap. He didn't mean to perish hungry.

My wife sat on a tussock and waited patiently for me to put everything right: it is not, you understand, her province to be forcible and ingenious and equal to emergencies.

I mingled the mud on my sleeve with the sweat on my brow and, "Well," I said, "here we are, aren't we?"

"Aye," said a voice which I knew very well, "thayer 'ee be." Looking up I perceived our little friend Charles grinning amiably at me through the fence that bordered the nearest wood.

"Saved!" we cried, though I, for one, didn't at all see how; but when your entire resources are defeated any new ally seems like a host.

"Thate air donkey," said Charles, as he skipped nimbly through the rails, "thate air old donkey stand on good clean gravel. He's all right. See un eat, then, the ole sinner. Seems to he like as if 'tis a good chance to idle a bit."

"You relieve my mind immensely, Charles," I said, but he was speaking to my wife.

"Well, Susan," he said, "told 'ee I'd seek 'ee out 'fore long. Got a sandwicher to spayer, likely?"

"Why not have tea now?" said my wife to me. "Jack's all comfy. Why not us?"

"If I could only clear this cart," I said, straining at a wheel. It seemed to me to be a matter of vital importance that the cart should be extricated at once, at once.

"Be easy then," said Charles. "Sit down, then, won't 'ee? There's naught so bad but what it can be worsened by fretting."

"It's all very well," I said, "for you to be philosophical. *You* can sleep out with impunity. But I have to get this delicate young woman back to Emery Down before night and how the——?"

"Hand the victuals, then," he said, pointing to the food-parcel and the thermos, "and leave all thate air to I. Susan shan't perish, I pramise 'ee. Bain't *Igh* yer?"

In spite of his few inches he spoke so confidently and looked so stalwart that my soul was greatly comforted. I understood that we were in good hands. Susan was not to perish. If this was promised me on the word of a wood-godling, who was I to exhibit doubt? What allies might our Charles not be able to enlist in our services? No doubt a single call upon his pipes would bring us furry and feathered aid to any extent. A legion of rabbits would emerge from the trees and, plying their hind legs nimbly, dig me Jack and the cart out of their quag in the twinkling of an eye; or pigeons by the ten thousand would descend upon us and with beak, claw and wing bear me my property easily to firmer ground. I was curious to see how Charles would set about our salvation, but it was clear that he was not to

be hustled. He proposed, before everything else, to have his meal.

I brought the provisions to them and we made our feast at once.

We enquired about the badger-wedding and whether all had passed off auspiciously. Charles reassured us on this point. His music, he told us, had been the feature of the occasion. We told him that was of course, and how many guests were there ? we asked.

He spread out his ten fingers and said that there had been many more than that. Every badger in the New Forest had been invited and all had come except one very old gentleman, of Denny Wood, who was too stiff to travel so far but sent a young fox friend of his to represent him, with a dish of preserved stag-horn beetles as his contribution to the supper. There were some other foxes, many stoats, several weasels and a few polecats. The company, you see, was a little mixed but badgers are such good-natured things, not a bit stuck up, and I have Charles's word for this. They will, it appears, eat with anyone who will eat with them. Bohemians!

I wish we could have assisted at the ball. Charles told us that it is a great sight to see a badger dance. He laughed himself breathless at the recollection and gave us a masterly imitation of the lumpy performance. The weasels, he said, were immeasurably the superiors of every one else there ; they are the contortionists of the woods, and can do anything with their bodies. Charles described a sort of square dance which must have

been worth seeing. It was given by eight weasels and it ended with the dancers knotting themselves up, all together, into a tight ball and thus spinning three times round the dancing-floor by the propulsion of exterior feet. He played us the music for this dance and another for a *pas de deux* that was executed by a vixen and a polecat, both most taking airs, but, like all Charles's music, by no means to be remembered.

He told us that his pink ribbon had been greatly admired, but that since it had stayed very unsatisfactorily on the horn where my wife had tied it, he had taken the liberty of altering its situation. To illustrate his words he rose and turned his back upon us; a miserable little black string was then discoverable, knotted about the tail of Charles. He walked about proudly, twitching his stumpy codicil to show us how well-become it was by its ornament. My wife would have given him a fresh one only she was loath to seem critical of his appearance.

When he had eaten his fill he took a squint at the sun, now declining, and said, "'Ee'd best be getting home-along, I rackon. 'Tis a fighérish way to the road and then 'tis a smartish step to Emery Down. I'll just get thate air cart and donkey out fer 'ee, though."

"Good!" I said, "and how are you going to do it?"

"Ah," he said, "but that's what '*ee* musn' see."

"And Susan?" I asked.

"Susan nuther," he replied firmly. "'Tis a

wonder I be gwine t'do. So just lay down, then, the two of 'ee, and cover eyes till I say the word. Won't kape 'ee long." He grinned and winked and fingered his pipes.

He looked so very important and mysterious and altogether so like a little boy who is going to perform a conjuring-trick with sixpennorth of apparatus bought at Hamley's, that we were constrained to obey. We lay down and covered eyes. Then we heard the seductive music of this faunlet; there followed a rustling and a crackling and the voice of Charles giving orders, with authority but quite unintelligibly. We heard the cart rise from the mud with a squ-u-u-u-u-sh, we heard Jack do the same and also bray in alarm; then Charles cried, "'Tis done," and I looked up just in time to see four young firs slipping back into their places near the wood's edge. My wife saw them too, so there can be no doubt about it.

As for the donkey and cart they stood on the far side of the quag, muddy enough but saved.

As for Charles, he had vanished.

As for me I began to collect the tea-things.

As for my wife she stared at a brilliant small necklace of holly-berries which lay by her foot.

. . . . . .

But I mustn't leave you stranded in the middle of the Highland Water Inclosure. You will almost certainly want to get out and home to Emery Down. Continue, then, along the main avenue of this fir city, allowing its lesser streets to branch away, right and left, without once yielding to their seductive invitations. You need never be in any

doubt until you see your road fork and a gate across the left-hand path. Leave this path alone and go on. Soon you will see a stream, a little way to the left, with a plank across it, over which you may pass unless you are driving a donkey; in this case you cross by the ford. You are now buried in the Woods and about as far from a road as you are likely to be in this end of the Forest. We saw a stag and three hinds go by as we passed this spot and I only hope you may be as lucky; for one doesn't see the deer every day and when they are encountered one must open one's eyes as wide as they will go and make the most of the chance.

A little beyond the ford is a made road. Turn to the left and ascend the steep hill of grass into which the road melts: as you climb a dog shall begin to bark near at hand, for over the summit is a cottage, a surprising discovery in this solitude. By this time your eyes have grown so accustomed to trees that they can hardly credit brick and thatch. In this cottage lives the Witch of Highland Water. I saw her, as I went by, and she was busy with a hive. She looked a kindly witch, as of course she must be, living as she does in the Highland Water Inclosure. I am sure that children might visit her with impunity, probably with profit. Her son gave me my road, down the hill past the cottage, up the next (holding to the left) and so through the gate. If you follow his directions you will come out on the Ringwood Road just by the gate into Bolderwood and three miles from Emery Down.

This is a prodigious fine voyage and absolutely impossible for petrol; but you must have dry weather for it if you urge a donkey.

In making these two drives we spent two of our three full days at Emery Down. On the third, according to custom, we gave the ass a holiday, for on the morrow we expected to go away and who knew how far our little beast might have to travel before that sun should set? Certainly we did not. So in the morning we put Jack's nose into a holly on the lawn behind the Inn, and ourselves waited there upon lunch and tea. Before dinner we walked and saw our first oak in leaf and heard a Centaur snort and gallop down a glade behind impenetrable hollies under Lyndhurst Hill.

XVIII. *Of a Barber and of his Assistant.*

We left Emery Down about half-past nine in perfect weather, that is to say, breeze, sun and cloud. Our night's destination we had not thought about very seriously though we supposed that we might quite possibly sleep in Brockenhurst. Our immediate object was Lyndhurst and that was enough for the moment. Lyndhurst had been chosen because it had been discovered that I had forgotten to have my hair cut for several months, and my wife thought that I would do well to seize the chance granted me by this day's freedom from pressing business. Always willing to oblige her where I can, I agreed.

It was my lot at Lyndhurst to fall into the hands of a young man who was remarkable above all barbers on two counts; first he was absolutely silent. He set about me without so much as enquiring my wishes concerning my hair and when I told them to him he only grunted. I loved him for his taciturnity, and while he clipped and jagged me with the points of his scissors I fell into a meditation upon the general undesirability of barbers' small-talk. In itself the shearing process is detestable enough. The construction of the throat, the acid sound of the scissors close to one's

ear, the perpetual apprehension of a stab, the entrance of hair between the lips, the irritation of it upon the cheeks and nape, all these things make the occasion one to be avoided. Add to these physical discomforts the mental torture produced by the observations of the barber and you have a sort of foretaste of hell.

Personally I would welcome baldness with both hands. Hair, so far as I can see, serves no useful purpose whatever. Before hats were invented there may have been something to be said for it, but nowadays it is an anachronism and should be extirpated. If everybody was bald what a vast deal of discomfort would be saved ! how much of anxiety, envy, money, swindling, disappointment, misery, shame, and regret the advertisement columns of our newspapers sufficiently declare. If everybody, again, was bald, no one would notice it. We should pride ourselves upon our cranial indices or the size of our frontal prominences. We should slightly adjust our standard of human beauty and the world would roll on without a stagger. I think a Short Act might very well be passed against hair. Until this shall be done I will be content with a statute (short or long) which shall put a sudden end to the chatter of barbers. I demand this just as much for the sake of these miserable men as for that of their victims. Have you ever considered how terrible —when their remarks are so terrible to their customers—how terrible, I say, must their remarks be to themselves. More terrible still must they be to their companions.

We may safely conclude that the average standard of intelligence among barbers is not exalted. Not in the ranks of handicraftsmen do we seek for the rarest minds. This need not be argued.

Now a very Gladstone should not utter small-talk for twelve hours every day (save fifty-two) of the year, without repeating himself. In six months or so he would inevitably come back to the Homing Instinct of the Lepidosiren or whatever else it was that he began with.

Consider then the ordinary, plain, journeyman barber, denied, by his hours, all opportunity of self-cultivation. Perhaps he can snatch a glance at the *Daily Mirror* between his busy times. From this source alone shall he widen his range of chatter.

Inevitably he descends upon the weather, the contents of the *Mirror* and local gossip. Such topics last him through one shave, one hair cut and one shampoo. A new customer sits before him and he is constrained to tread the same conversational round. A third, and he does it all over again. Must or must not the soul of such a man presently sicken and die within him—as towards six o'clock in the evening he grinds it all out for the twentieth time? And if he loathes himself, how shocking must be his sentiments towards his fellows whom he hears all day as echoes of himself! How infernal theirs towards him!

My eyes were opened to these considerations in the following way.

It fell upon a day that, my hair getting between

me and my enjoyment of landscapes, I was constrained to submit myself to the abbreviator. The shop when I entered it contained three persons—a clergyman, an elderly barber and a young one. The elderly one was occupied in lathering the clergyman's chin. To the skill of the young one, then, I offered my head.

He proved dexterous and charmingly unloquacious and I should have been as little miserable as my circumstances permitted had it not been for the artist who flourished his razor hard by. This is to be said for him; he expected no replies from his clergyman. Observations flowed from him as water gushes from a burst main, heedless of all check. And he had a variety which I have never noted in another barber. He was, when I entered, relating the history of a local cricket ground, built over, then, some fifteen or twenty years. He described its exact situation, referring to the names of the streets and public-houses now built upon the ancient site. He spoke of the turf and of a famous groundman, who flourished there, it appears, forty years ago. He informed the room concerning this groundman's wife and her difficult labour with her sixth child; he described a great stroke made by this groundman's brother in the year '75. He told us the colour of this groundman's eyes, and the quality of his voice and how he sang in the Cathedral choir. Then suddenly he skipped to a topic of the day, some nobleman's alliance with a Lady of the Chorus, I think, and produced some admirable reflections upon the follies of the idle rich. He then enquired after

some Rector's health and gave us an account of the recent illness sustained by some Vicar, unknown apparently to his customer. He was very profuse upon the Vicar and in his details he was hideous. We had the number of poultices applied within a certain twenty-four hours and much more of the kind. Without a pause he slid into a monologue on wasps, prompted to it by the entrance and exit of a humble-bee. He recommended the blue bag for stings. Nothing like it, he said, and was loud (and long) in praise of the good old-fashioned remedies. He hypnotized me.

Having accomplished the shaving of the clergyman he began to cut the poor fellow's hair. There was not very much of it, but enough to enable this miscreant to air his views on nearly twelve different matters wholly devoid of interest and importance. He talked as he drew in his breath.

At last the clergyman rose, stroked his chin, took his hat and went into the front shop. The elderly barber, according to custom, followed him in order to receive his money across the counter. My young barber and I were left alone.

Instantly this youth hissed into my ear with incredible speed the following distressing speech:

" 'E's enough to drive a man to drink, sir, that's what he is. I bin with him one month and I'm damned if I can stick it much longer. *Talk*, talk, *talk*, talk! It might be a gramophone. That's the third time to-day he's given us the groundman. That's his speciality just now. Last week it was—Oh Lord! Oh Lord!" He relapsed into quivering silence for his master had returned.

I had no further opportunity of lending a sympathetic ear to the passionate declaration of his woes by my poor young man, but I have often thought how tense must have been his condition if he was prepared to risk his place for the sake of that short explosion. I do not think he can have kept it long in any case. That day or the next or the next the outburst must have come. I can picture him suddenly flinging down his scissors or other weapon (to the astonishment and terror of his customer) and shrieking into the middle of his master's words some mad insolence of a prohibitory nature: "Oh! dry up!" perhaps, or, "Oh! stow it! can't you?" or perhaps nothing more intelligible than, "Oh, hell!"

Since that day I have pitied all barbers. Before it I never thought very much about them. Now I do, always, at any rate, when I am having my hair cut, though that, to be sure, happens very seldom.

I have said that my Lyndhurst barber was remarkable for two things and that the first was his silence, for which I loved him. The second, that your curiosity may be appeased (in case I have aroused it), was his incompetence. He reaped my hair into such a pattern as I have never seen, but I made no complaint. The thing was done and only time could heal the disaster. I reflected also that all things are to be forgiven to a silent hairdresser. Moreover, the hair was short again and I should not have to have it cut for long enough.

Then I joined my wife who had been in the cart all this time.

XIX. *Of a Dog.*

I FOUND her talking to a dog, a black wavy dog with a white shirt front, not unlike a spaniel and bearing a good deal of resemblance to a retriever. He stood in the road by the step of the cart and gazed with a very becoming adoration into the eyes of my wife. She held a biscuit in her hand and as I joined them she threw it into the air. The dog, with much cleverness, caught it, bolted it; then sat on his tail and waited for more. I spoke to this dog. "Hullo, dog!" I said and held out a hand to him, for he was an engaging beast. Instantly he bounded to my side and overwhelmed me with protestations of love.

Now it is pleasant to be well received by dogs; a man's heart goes out to all animals that seem to like him. At such times one accepts without question that foolish old superstition concerning the ability of dogs and children to read beneath the surface of those whom they encounter. Every time a dog responds amiably to one's advances one is confirmed in one's good opinion of oneself. Therefore I fondled this dog, told him he was a good old fellow, bade my wife observe what a jolly old dog he was, and, taking the new piece of biscuit which she had prepared for him from between

her fingers, I threw it into the air and laughed to see our guest's agility in catching it.

"And now," said I, "for Brockenhurst," and, chucking Jack up, I shepherded the expedition down Lyndhurst Street, the dog barking and bounding by my side. In a few moments we came to the Brockenhurst Road which turns out of the High Street to the right.

The dog held straight on down the High Street, then paused, looked back, wagged his tail, barked invitingly, ran a few yards forwards, stopped, looked back, wagged, barked, ran on and looked back again.

"Good-bye," I called to him. "Good-bye, dog. We're not going to Beaulieu this morning"—for the dog was on the Beaulieu Road.

"Why not?" said my wife.

"Well," said I, "I don't know. Why not?"

"Let us go to Beaulieu," said my wife. "The dog wishes it. I expect he knows what is best for us as well as we do ourselves."

"Yes," I said, "it is a sort of an indication."

"Shall we go to Beaulieu, dog?" said my wife to the retriever-spaniel who had come back to plead with us at closer quarters. He barked vehemently.

"As you will," said I to the two of them and I turned Jack's nose into the Beaulieu Road. "But," said I, "when we come to the end of the town where the road forks to Beaulieu and to Lyndhurst Road Station, I will not be persuaded—not by any dog living—along the Station road. That would carry us to Southampton."

Where the road forked the dog never hesitated a second. He went down the Beaulieu Road, barking fit to split himself.

I said, "This courteous and kindly beast! He will see us on our way, the way he has chosen for us, and then return home happy in a very good action done. And how well he understood our needs! Only look ahead, and bless him."

I said this because the Beaulieu Road sets out on its journey up-hill over a fair common whereon is gorse. I think roads should always thus leave towns when it is morning and when the weather is fine. Under such conditions the mood is an adventurous one. The whole day is before a man with all its possibilities and opportunities. The blood runs quick in his veins; he wants plenty of room for the activity that he feels in him. Loud cheerful singing should always accompany such departures and for this great spaces are the best. The lungs crave huge draughts of air; there cannot be too much of it; and on a broad common one has no sense of stint. Here all the sky is visible, alive with the vast procession of the clouds. Their shadows rush over the land, pass, and the sun again smites hot. Everywhere there is light and warmth, wind and large movement. The world is seen to be wide. A mile ahead the road shines white upon a brow. What shall be discovered beyond? In the pale blue of another horizon mountains float; or there is a glitter that we know for the sea. Youth naturally craves everything all at once, is naturally impatient of barriers, and in the morning we should all be young.

So I would always leave a country town early in the day and begin my journey with a gorsy common and an up-hill road. I would have geese upon the grass also, to hiss at me as I go by, the self-satisfied stay-at-homes. In the evening I require a path through water-meadows, a white chalk path that leads among bubbling carriers to an old mill. Downs, golden green, close in the view and great elms soar black against a flaming West. By such a road would I always make an evening departure, bounded close by the things I know and love ; for so the night shall fall without terror and I shall meet the stars with a quiet mind.

Out, then, over Lyndhurst Common, with a fresh gale in our faces, and the scent of gorse in our noses, we and the dog went along the Beaulieu Road, my wife perched high on the green sausage, I sauntering behind the cart, Jack plodding between the shafts. I perceived no signs of elation about the ass, but the other members of the party were just as gay as the weather. We sang extraordinarily well that morning. We even invented a tune with words, and this only happens on occasions of the rarest quality. Some of the words were my wife's, others mine ; part of the tune welled up from the fountains of her being, part from my fountains. Now when either of us is inspired with a tune we both do nothing for a long period but sing it over and over, lest it be forgotten ; for neither of us is capable of putting music on paper, and we do horribly dread the loss of our melodies. Glorying in our gifts, we almost forgot to urge the

ass onwards. His slowness, accordingly, staggers belief.

Far out among the gorse and heather walked a solitary man. He moved parallel with ourselves and no more rapidly. Every twenty yards or so he stopped, visibly drank in the air, visibly admired the great prospects eastwards over the woods of Ashurst Walk. He was a well-dressed man, lank, tall, young, having the appearance of a country gentleman. We thought so highly of him because he was employing his time so properly, that we ended by desiring his acquaintance. I expect we should have hailed him and had trouble with him if Providence had not directed our attention elsewhere.

We found suddenly that we were a good mile from Lyndhurst and that the dog was still with us. He had not yet returned home to meditate comfortably upon his good deed. He was still performing it and it was clearly time for him to be gone. We loved him, but we did not want him as a possession.

I said, "Now, dog, you've shown us our way and we are much obliged to you. Suppose you run home now, what? Mustn't make mistress anxious." Such a nice dog would have a nice mistress, I felt sure, and I did not want her to be alarmed for her pet.

The dog came running to me, fawned upon me, licked my hand and sprang away, rejoicing in this little opportunity which I had given him of testifying his affection for me. I saw that he had failed to understand my meaning.

I pointed to Lyndhurst far away and "Off home with you" I said as sternly as I could. But my voice was softened by my liking for the pretty beast and I did not really want him to go. "Don't you do it," said my wife, "Come donkey-touring with us and see the world." Such a small matter as the Right of Ownership attaching, as concerned this dog, to some charming citizen of Lyndhurst could hardly expect to be remembered by this irresponsible woman. Her mind this morning was full of much more beautiful abstractions, the joy of life, the complete non-existence of all duties and obligations, adventure and so forth. But I refused to be a dog-stealer and I again told this black quasi-spaniel to be gone. Believing once more that I invited his caresses, he again fawned amiably upon me, lolling out his tongue, waving his tail about and gazing at me with trustful, liquid eyes. I led him by the collar a little way towards Lyndhurst. I thrust him a few inches in the direction in which I wished him to go and I said to him, this time very sternly, "Go home, sir. Go home this instant." Evidently firmness was needed with this dog.

My wife laughed, but she had the grace not to invite the dog to disobedience. She understood by this time that it was unnecessary.

The dog cowered motionless for a moment to the roadway, awed by my terrible voice. Then his tail began to move, his eyes rolled pleadingly and he half got up. "No," I shouted. "No, go home, confound you!" I perceived that the dog was going to be a nuisance. I raised my stick threaten-

ingly and rushed at the dog with a little roar. He sprang away and galloped towards Lyndhurst. I turned to my wife. "You see," I said, "he only wants to be made to understand." Something licked my hand. It was the dog.

I refused to have this dog with us. I foresaw all sorts of trouble, interviews with the police, explanations offered to an angry owner and not accepted, prosecutions, prison, ruin and infamy. If I allowed the creature to come with us I should make myself responsible for him. And who knew but that he would gad off with the next people we met and we should have to follow him to Reading or somewhere where we did not in the least want to go—or stand the consequences.

So I struck at the dog with my stick and bellowed at him to depart. He frisked aside, caught my stick between his teeth and held on, barking happily. Here was a nice man, who got up games for his dumb friends. Again my wife laughed. It amuses her to see me grappling with difficulties.

I shook the dog off and threw a stone at him. He brought it to me, courting my approval.

At the second attempt I struck him near the root of his tail. He uttered a yelp and made for Lyndhurst. I watched him go, my arm raised threateningly, one foot forward; an attitude pregnant with command. Fifty yards from me his feet began to lag, and almost at once he halted and turned, beseeching us with every inch of him to be good sorts and let him come. I fired a third stone in his direction. The meaning of my actions at last became plain to him. He dropped to the

roadway, couched his nose between his paws and watched us till a gorse bush rose up to hide him from our eyes. I thanked goodness, clucked to the ass and we moved onwards for perhaps three minutes.

Suddenly my wife pointed and lo ! a black shape far out in the heather, performing with infinite craft what is known, I understand, to military persons as an outflanking movement. He was clearly visible through his entire journey. The gorse bush had blotted out some, not all, memory of my wishes. This was evident from the wiliness with which he availed himself of every little bush and stone behind which an inch or two of him might be concealed. He was moving very slowly when we sighted him, but while he overtook us he grew less careful, as the impossibility of our intentions being real became more and more certain, and as he came abreast of us all caution forsook him, with all belief in the hardness of our hearts and, galloping boldly forwards, he disappeared *ventre à terre* behind a little rise in the road and almost immediately afterwards topped our skyline and came bounding towards us wagging for approval.

Two miles behind us Lyndhurst was just visible.

" Very good," said I, " your blood be upon your own head. Come or stay, I have done my best for you. I waste no more breath on you. I throw no more stones at you. I am out on an extended holiday, not a morning's dog-training. But I shall give you to the first policeman we meet. If that is understood, come along."

The dog signified his acceptance of these con-

ditions by barking furiously under the nose of the ass. Then he rushed away on to the moor and chased a rabbit into its hole.

And so we came down into Matley Bog where all the land was bright orange with bog-myrtle and over against us was a wooded hillside marvellous with tall birches, in their earliest leaf, against a red background of budding beech. For at Matley Bog the great Woods of the Irons Hill Walk come to the moor's edge to look northwards, across the beginnings of the Beaulieu River, to their cousins by Colbury and Marchwood, and it was Denny Inclosure which flamed thus emerald-green in the morning sunlight.

The dog, caring for none of these things, was busy at the stream's edge nosing for a water-rat. He was perfectly happy. No sorrow for (it may be) a tearful little mistress clouded his delight; no anxiety as to how or where he himself should dine came between him and his pleasures. Dogs are more commonly foolish than wise, but of all the empty-headed idiots of his kind that I have ever met with this one was surely the least sagacious.

We now entered upon a scorching, flat and desolate waste of heather and sparse fir trees. The fresh wind had all died away, killed by the strength of the sun. A few wisps of cirrus floated overhead, all that was left of the brave cloud-show which had graced our departure. The wide views which we had enjoyed from the high lands between Lyndhurst and Matley were no longer for our eyes to gaze upon. Our road was visibly long and

hot ; its surface was all loose gravel and Jack refused to do anything but crawl. I pushed behind, for the map showed me nearly three miles of this sort of thing before we should reach the trees again, and Beaulieu was two beyond that. The dog gambolled about, barking and getting in the way. As for offering to help, it was not in him.

At this time, as I pushed, perspiring, I hated the dog, who had persuaded me against my better judgment not to go to Brockenhurst through the woods. The dust of the highway, kicked up by Jack, rose continually to settle in my nostrils, and larynx and on my uvula. It descended far into my gullet and windpipe. It entered my eyes and caked upon my face. Jack simply permitted me to impel him forwards. The dog had probably barked to him that I was an easy fool, but Jack had learned that many days earlier than this. A sulphur butterfly gladdened my sight for a few seconds but it was soon gone. All else was dead heather and stunted evergreens and dust. The Woodland is for many reasons the country for the donkey-cart, just as wide open spaces are, I should imagine, most suitable for rapid movers. At one and a half miles an hour it is bad to see too far at a time, but at forty it must double the sense of power and speed to open new vast horizons every ten minutes or so. With a fast phaeton and pair we should have passed this interminable league of gritty dusty road in a quarter of an hour. In a motor-car—but what am I saying ?

My wife who had swung on ahead in her excess of youth and animal spirits returned to report the

existence of buildings in our path. I knew, from the map, that she spoke of Beaulieu Road Railway Station. Here was an added offence, a railway line. I resented the South-Western Railway as an eyesore upon the Forest and a reminder of a detested civilization. I had come on this journey to be alone with my wife and Nature, not to encounter stinking trains and smug little railway stations. I desired to be alone with my wife and Nature and as far as possible from this donkey and cart which I seemed condemned to shove into Beaulieu.

But as we neared these buildings I perceived that a railway station could not account for them all. There was the station sure enough, but what was that beyond it? What large red mansion should stand beside a railway station in the middle of this desert? And I told my soul that here was the very likeness of a most comfortable looking hotel. A sudden vision of cold drink in a pot I dismissed instantly to the fiend who had sent it. Here was no inn. Here no occasion for the quenching of thrist. It was a mirage, I saw, with its signboard hanging beside the parched road. It was an illusion, consequent upon excessive pushing with the toes in an almost horizontal position. Only in delirium did I read the words "Bar and Tea-Room" in white letters upon the glass of its lower windows. My wife was not drinking ginger-beer. The man who was pouring more ginger-beer out of a stoneware bottle into a glass for me would presently vanish in smoke and depart with a laugh of hideous mockery. But I should remain with

my mouth half open to receive, my sopping handkerchief pressed to my streaming face. Then the dog would come and lick my hand and I should kill it and have to pay compensation to its owner or go to gaol. I had decided to go to gaol, when I became quite certain that liquor was pouring into my interior, and with that I woke up and knew that the Beaulieu Road Station Hotel was a wonderful reality.

Whispering for further drink I staggered to the bench on which my wife was sitting. The dog came to me at once and endeavoured to get up on my knees. He was too big for that sort of nonsense and I repulsed him, but gently, for I was already something like myself and I was still far from strong.

And then my eyes fell upon a policeman who was just getting off his bicycle at the door of this Inn.

And I immediately gave the dog to the policeman and had not a care in the world.

XX. *Of a Bath.*

After a period of repose I became aware that it was the hour of luncheon, and I said to my soul, "Let us eat here in this so-opportunely-presented hotel where there is such an abundant supply of drink. Let us rest ourselves and our donkey for an hour or so and then let us get on to Beaulieu. The map says that the trees begin again a mile beyond this spot and among the trees we shall go in comfort. Come! the worst is over. Let us make merry over our tribulations."

I went into the tea-room, where I heard my wife's voice, to impart to her these priceless reflections. I found her talking to the landlady of the hotel.

It appeared that we were in a house of the P.R.H.A. or something of the kind, just taken over from the H.P.H.T. or some other letters equally significant. I perceived that we had to do with one of the model public-houses about which one heard so much a few years ago, places, you will remember, which were (like so many other things) to solve the Drink Question. This they were to do by denying themselves any but the smallest dividends, by making the brewing of tea profitable (in commission) to their managers and the emptying of beerpots not profitable, and by other

methods which I do not remember. Clergymen blessed the endeavours of these inns, even joined their boards of management. The solution of the Problem was said to be in sight. The poor man was to have his beer for the future at a table and perpendicular drinking was to cease in the land. In no long time it would be an honour to be seen emerging from a public-house, so moral and so model were all places of refreshment to become, now that the way was shown.

I had never hitherto encountered a Trust Public-House and my curiosity was aroused. I joined in the conversation of my wife and the landlady. Ultimately we were invited to examine the premises.

We found ourselves walking through a cool and spacious corridor, clean, fresh painted, simply and tastefully constructed. We mounted by a pleasant light stair to the upper storey and were admitted to a large cool bedroom with two neat new little beds in it and lit by a great bay window, looking to the north. Outside the road glared in the sun, and all the waste heather-land was a-tremble with heat. A motor-car raced by, accompanied by choking clouds.

The eyes of my wife met mine, and one of us was about to speak when the landlady said, "And now you must see our bath."

"Dear me," said I, "have you a bath then?"

It appeared that a bath was a speciality of the P.R.H.A. No house of theirs was without one. This bath was evidently the pride of our hostess's eyes. We followed her towards it.

When we arrived in its presence we were dumb, it was so beautiful. Snow-white porcelain, if you please, and great shining wide-mouthed brass taps.

Now we had not seen a bath with taps for a week.

We said, "What are your terms?"

The landlady produced a tariff card. Wily woman! She had known that we could never resist her bath.

One of us said, "I'll go and have the donkey sent round to the stable and get our things brought up." The other turned on the taps and the water gushed, hot and cold, into that delectable tub.

"This is *your* bath," she said.

Ten minutes later I was up to my chin in it and the road was sweltering on its way to Beaulieu without me.

XXI. *Of Our Life at Beaulieu Road.*

At Beaulieu Road for two days we postponed the labour of repacking the green sausage. I do not remember that we did very much more than this. I have an impression of being most villainously bogged somewhere near the upper waters of the Beaulieu River and another of struggling to draw the dead ruin of a mighty beech which lay prostrate at the foot of a mightier and a third of destroying the resultant horror. Here also it was that Jack began to be perverse. Hitherto he had been, during our halts, a very good donkey, standing with exemplary patience for as long as we cared to stay in any given spot. So long as there was holly to chew he had chewed it, asking apparently for nothing better. Now, however,—I suppose because he was getting too highly fed in his stables —his spoiled stomach began to weary of Forest fare. That food upon which a week earlier he had flung himself like an alderman on turtle soup was now not nearly good enough for him. The jaded palate of this ass sickened at wholesome holly, craving the meretricious oat, the choice hay, the exquisite mangold-wurzel. True, when just tied up to a bush, he would still nibble a while, for it was not in him absolutely to reject any kind of food, but soon he would take a fancy for some neighbouring tree,

where, to his delicate eye, the shoots seemed more tender, and he would signify his wishes by fidgeting. My wife who sat in the cart attempting to read the close print of a dictionary would find the world dancing up and down, and after a few rebukes would emerge, lead the donkey to the bush of his desires (there was no difficulty about this, for he ran there), tie him up once more and so resume her study. Ten minutes later the creature would have again wearied of his victuals and, bethinking himself of stables and the good things there awaiting him, would again begin his short, sudden and distracting plunges. Gorse he still enjoyed and if we could only find him a gorse bush he would try to be moderately contented; but gorse is not everywhere. Not yet, but later, we were compelled to choose our resting-places with a single eye to the abundance of gorse. This was when he had altogether learned to abominate holly. The pictures which I painted during those days were all of gorse bushes, a detestable kind of subject, incomparably hard to render attractively. So the ass began to dominate us more and more strongly. He walked now everywhere but on the gentlest downward slopes, and there he would only run when violently beaten. Let the road tilt a hair's-breadth upwards and his so-called trot fell from him instantly. Should he reach the verge of anything that could, without straining the word, be called a hill he bunched himself together, called upon his gods to protect him in this peril and with excessive caution made the descent, snorting his apprehensions for his knees.

Yet we bore with him. Life was still a long business and we were careless of arriving anywhere in particular. Rather than contend and so introduce discord into our existence we let him have his way. And the more we let him have, the more he took, as is the vile custom of brutes and men alike. Alas that it should be so ! Alas that holly should grow insipid to the lips that taste regular hay ! Alas that advantage should be taken of an indolently philosophical desire to avoid scenes ! Alas that the only way to save trouble in this world should be to take it !

I am sure, then, that a great deal of our halt at Beaulieu Road was occupied in attending to the capricious requirements of this, our beast of draught, in enslaving ourselves to our servant, in finding him the sweetest holly and the soothest gorse. For the rest we lay about under trees or out in the heather and read to one another and plotted those novels which shall some day be written, or shall not as the case shall be. Or we would construct the ideal house which shall some day be built. It was not a heavy labour, our materials being no more substantial than those which, frenzied, one packs into those exiguous boxes which torment the worse kind of dream. The dream which we indulged beneath the beeches of Denny Wood is far from being the worst, but it is one that bristles with points of discussion. When two are making an imaginary house everything is important. In the house of bricks and mortar they may agree to pass this and that. Expense has to be considered, trouble also. If the

tiles of the fireplace in the second guest-room are not the absolute shade, they may be allowed to remain. Their removal means a bill to pay.

But this is the glory of the imaginary house: there are no bills to pay in connection with it. Expense does not enter into consideration at all and the greater the trouble that is taken the better the fun shall prove. Those tiles are banished at the first breath of objection; others are popped in their places, and if the effect be not above criticism, tile stores beyond the belief of Doulton are at the service of the builders. So with the drawing-room coal-scuttle and with the pantry shelves. It would surely be madness to accept anything but the very best—when all is at one's discretion—and sheer wickedness to hurry over the choice. We began this house long ago and it is still a-building. Certain matters are definitely settled, but we do not mind. They are not very many and we do not regret them. There is so much still to be seen to. I don't believe, for instance, that we shall ever get the dining-room to our liking. Oak is so handsome and mahogany is so lustrous; and walnut too has a strong hold upon our affections. Sometimes it is one and sometimes another. At Beaulieu Road it was mahogany without a single dissentient voice; yet later on at Brockenhurst, up by the Rifle Range, we sent all the mahogany away and telegraphed to the old shop in Salisbury to know if they had that Jacobean oak dresser still. It was a breathless business waiting for the answer. At Beaulieu Road also I secured the wall-cupboard

which has since been such a comfort to me. I positively require a place into which things may be hurled when they annoy me by lying about unwanted. At Beaulieu Road, again, my wife chose the Nankin vases which stood for three days on the hall bookcase until we put the bookcase into my room, where the scheme demanded brass and copper rather than porcelain. Yes, it was at Beaulieu that those vases were returned to Old Dickson at Penzance. We regretted them a good deal, but we soon found some that we liked even better. We still have them. We must buy them, when we can afford the outlay, which is enormous.

XXII. *Of a Journey to Beaulieu.*

So comfortable were we in Beaulieu Road Station Hotel and in its fine great bath, and so happy were we outside it on the heather and in the sun (which continued marvellously to shine) that we gave up the idea of staying in Beaulieu at all. We would visit it one day, of course ; it would make an object for a drive, and now and then an object is useful because it decides which way the donkey's head shall be turned when setting out in the morning. It seemed foolish to undertake the labour of packing when we could go to the place and come back in an afternoon. No, having seen Beaulieu we would return and make straight for Brockenhurst, when at last we should move, across the great Denny Lodge Wood. The map offered us a path that way. Thus we would make our journey all among trees and avoid that hot moor which the map showed between Beaulieu and Brockenhurst. In this weather and with the beeches coming out, the road that led through trees was clearly the best.

On our third day, then, we went to Beaulieu in the afternoon. Nothing memorable occurred save this : Jack galloped for two yards. We had been talking of methods by which he might be

made to go a little faster than he usually does. I had suggested a corkscrew twisted into his rump, handy for the driver. It would, I believed, be necessary only to give it a slight turn occasionally to cause him to develop quite a fair turn of speed. My wife approved of this plan but saw a difficulty. When the corkscrew should have been screwed in right up to the handle—what then? Another corkscrew, I said. She thought this would be going too far with the animal; we should be getting very near to cruelty. Now a red-hot poker, kept alive in the thermos——

It was at this moment that Jack galloped.

When we came to Beaulieu we fell in love with it. It has a charming appearance from the Lyndhurst road, set, as it seems, all round its lake. The wind was fresh and smacked of the sea; it turned the waters of the lake dark blue; it set the willows and sedges dancing and dipping. We had not seen so much water for a fortnight; the bath at Beaulieu Road was nothing to this. And when we were in the street we found it delightful to behold, a place of small ancient grey houses and a noble old tide-mill all gables and grey tiles.

The tide was up, too, and as we crossed the bridge a wide estuary of blue water opened out before our delighted eyes; we saw low hills covered with budding trees, green meadows, and a barge at the hard, just getting up sail. Then we discovered the Abbey (which is the glory of the place) and the Abbey grounds, and saw the fine clipped hedges and lawns of Lord Montague and some old crusted

limes, starred with their inimitable young green. We told each other that here was a good place.

And all our baggage at Beaulieu Road!

Well, well, we were glad we had come. It was a pity we had tarried so long up there among the heather, for we might have spent a very good day or two down here by the tide. Yet, having the whole Forest to explore, we must content ourselves with this short view. I explained to my wife the importance of not delaying any longer in this end of the Forest. Brockenhurst to-morrow was still the word. And now for some tea; then to visit the Abbey and so away, regretfully.

First, however, let us, while we remember, get those stamps which we so urgently require for the letters which we are going to neglect to write. To the post office!

"Suppose," said my wife thoughtfully, as we passed the Montague Arms outside of which a lordly motor-car stood, "suppose we had come here, where should we have stayed?"

"We should have stayed there," I said, pointing to the big hotel. "And we should not have liked that. Imagine me dining among the wealthy in these driving-breeches!"

"Well," she said, "suppose we enquire at the post office. They may know of someone who lets rooms. If they don't (as we can't stay here) it would be pleasant to know that we should have had to stay at the hotel if we *had* come."

"But suppose," I said, "they give us an address."

"Oh, well," she replied, still thoughtfully,

" then we can go and see it and if it is horrid we shall be so glad that we didn't risk coming here for the night, shan't we ? "

I said, " You want to stay here." She denied it. She quite understood the importance of getting on. She reminded me that I had reminded her that we had still Brockenhurst and Lymington and East Boldre and Burley and Ringwood and Fordingbridge and Christchurch all to see. I was glad to find that she was alive to the necessity of visiting these places and to the shortness of our time. I said that I was sorry for suspecting her of wishing to loiter in this Beaulieu place. She told me not to bother to ask about those lodgings. I replied that there could be no harm in doing so. Perhaps some day we might come here again, with more time. In such an event it would be convenient to know of good lodgings.

At the post office they immediately recommended me to the Mill Cottage and there we went. You will agree, I hope, that there could be no harm in looking at the place.

After looking at it we desired to look inside it.

" Suppose," said my wife, " we ask her to make us some tea. I'm sick of thermos. And we can size her up."

Ten minutes later I was eating the following things.

Honest bread with choice butter upon it.

Strawberry jam, with the berries all whole, floating in a delectable syrup.

Hot scones as toothsome as anything north of the Tweed.

A large fragrant curranty cake.
Fresh eggs.
Marmalade that was marmalade.

My wife plied me with food. The cream in my tea was like gold. When I could eat no more I said, "For myself, I know Christchurch and Ringwood and Fordingbridge already, but I don't want you to miss them. There is a Priory at Christchurch which you really ought to see."

"If it comes to that," said my wife reflectively, "we haven't been into the Abbey here yet. We were going after tea, weren't we?" and she half rose.

I said, "I will go nowhere for half an hour." As I lit my Cigarette our hostess came in with more scones.

It was arranged before we left that we should come with our luggage on the morning of the following day, in time for dinner—with a chicken in it.

XXIII. *Of a Search for a Stable.*

It was now necessary to find accommodation in Beaulieu for our ass. We tried at the butcher's and at the saddler's and at the grocer's; one and all declined us. As we crept about from point to point Beaulieu became interested in us; grinning faces popped up above wire blinds and protruded themselves from doorways. I grew nervous under this giggling scrutiny.

The donkey is unshakably established as a comic beast. I cannot see why. He is a pretty creature, in my opinion, and if it be his proverbial stupidity which excites mirth, I deny it. He is among the most sagacious of brutes. Consider this Jack. A fool would have trotted about the village, welcoming this opportunity of showing off his paces to the multitude. That was what I wanted him to do. Jack, however, knowing perfectly well that I cannot belabour him while anyone looks on, took his own time. He saw an opportunity, not of a vainglorious exhibition, but of an easy half-hour, free from blows and from the unpleasant sound of my voice raised in command. For as it is impossible for me to strike him under the eyes of strangers, so I may not roar and bellow at him for their entertainment. Nor was this snail-work in Beaulieu a solitary instance of his wisdom.

Every human being that we meet in our journey produces a similar result. Be it pedestrian or vehicle that appears upon the road Jack slows up —yea, though he be barely moving—and until the passing has been accomplished he takes his insolent ease. Only once has he been known to make a mistake and that was when he thought, on a gentle downward slope, to stroll past a baby in a perambulator, left by the roadside. He did not, as I did, see the little girls, who were supposed to be in charge of these things, far away on the other side of a field plucking primroses. I think he was startled nearly out of his skin by the rain of blows and curses which fell about him, for he absolutely sprang forwards and never broke step for a hundred and forty-three yards.

This, then, is the stupidity of the ass at which a blind world smiles.

Though I am a shy man, I do not mind the passing grin—it is soon gone; but in populous places the effect we produce destroys my temper. There is something friendly about the encounter on the high-road; one easily smiles back; one can believe that the expansion of features reflects an amiable interest. In towns one feels a butt. There is too much amusement. Were one to try to smile a return to it all, one would gyrate grinning and assume the appearance of a Merry Andrew before his booth. The thing is impossible and one does not attempt it. Instead, one affects not to notice it. Whispering wicked words to a deaf ass, one endures it until an empty road be reached. Then one grasps the whip, but the ass, knowing himself in

danger, of his own accord steps out with a brisker hoof and even the excuse for currying his hide is gone.

I say there is nothing funny about a beast like this, yet the world goes on laughing at donkeys. I have not told a man, woman or child of our intention to travel thus through the Forest, but the face of him, of her or of it has incontinently wreathed itself in fatuous simpers. Let them only try it and see how comic it is, this ass-driving. I would pass a Short Act compelling everybody to qualify as a donkey-pusher ; so my fellows should learn to see this one thing, at least, as it is, and the sum of human error should be by thus much diminished.

Laughter is one of our most beautiful faculties and I am loath to do anything to stop it anywhere; but this laughter at and about asses and their masters is not the honest kind which I would always promote. It is a base laughter, rooted in ignorance and flowering in derision and should be abolished as soon as possible.

The open mockery of some chubby children finally drove me into the stables of the Montague Arms. I regretted the necessity, for I had no wish to house even a donkey at a place so frequented by motor-cars as is this hotel. I doubted seriously if the Montague Arms would condescend to receive an ass, but here I did it an injustice. It welcomed Jack—absolutely with a smile—and showed us into a palatial and enormous stall which it declared should be at our little creature's disposal for the sum of one and threepence a day. The terms staggered me but what would you ? If you walk with wealth you must

expect to pay through the nose. Here is another instance of the injury inflicted on their fellows by these fur-coated scoundrels. Money being nothing to them they throw it about recklessly and up goes the price of everything. Ten years ago I could have got my donkey the best stall in the Montague Arms for one and twopence a day, but now the place, careless of my humble patronage, slaps on another whole penny without shame or remorse or even a thought. It is take it or leave it. Robbers! Robbers!!

So indignant was I at the exorbitance of this demand that I was within an ace of marching us all out again into Beaulieu Street, but, turning towards the arch, I saw, framed in it, five lads whispering roguishly together about me, waiting obviously for our reappearance. I had a choice, before me, between three evils; either to close with the Montague Arms, or to confront once more the stares and cachinnations of Beaulieu, or to tell the lady at the Mill Cottage that we could not find a house for our donkey and go sadly away, leaving behind me but a tender memory of one glimpse at a superlative table. Of these evils the first seemed infinitely the least. One can sometimes make more money, but nervous wastage is not readily to be recaptured, and such cream, butter and jam as I had tasted at the Mill Cottage are rarities anywhere and in country lodgings generally unknown.

I engaged a bed-dining-room for our ass.

It was then too late to visit the Abbey, but we could see it on the morrow or the next day. There was no hurry, now, about the Abbey.

XXIV. *Of a Second Journey to Beaulieu.*

We covered the four miles of our journey on the following day handsomely in nine hours. This is the merit of having rooms engaged; you travel quite without anxieties. Hitherto, in our movings, we had not known where we should lay our heads at night and this, though it adds to the adventure, seriously compromises the ease of a journey. The sun has to be watched all day lest he should set suddenly and leave the voyager confounded by the night and far from any habitation. It is impossible happily to dally with luncheon; by four o'clock or five at the latest necessity urges advance. A lodging must be found. In these high latitudes and at this season darkness descends very much too early. I understand that a political party has been formed with the reasonable object of lengthening the day. It has my approval. Were I sufficiently intelligent to comprehend the purpose of politics, I would surely support such a party. I would wear its colours and shout myself hoarse as my candidate drove by. I would attend the meetings of the Longer Night man and ask him, from the body of the hall, searching questions, supplied to me by my committee-room on a printed slip of paper. Oh! I would heckle him soundly, I promise you, the dirty knave!

Yet I would not have this Longer Day party overdo it. Let them keep their zeal in hand. Let them remember that wise principle of statesmanship which I seem to have heard enunciated on more than one occasion recently, that it is easier to set a stone rolling than to stop it. In Autumn, Winter and Spring the days decidedly need lengthening, but in Summer I think they are long enough. I would not oppress the Night unduly, for she has charms of which the Day knows nothing. She must have her turn. I cannot contemplate living in a country where I could not witness the rising of a golden harvest moon above a dim blue waste of downland, or the crescent and the evening star setting in a rosy western sky. One has only to spend a June in Sutherland to know the misery of daylight over-prolonged.

Then, too, the Cape and Australia must be considered. The bond of Empire is a mighty force but nobody pretends that it is stronger than self-interest and if we are greedy in this matter of sunlight the loyalty of South Africa may be strained beyond endurance, while the Antipodes will never suffer an injustice of the kind. I believe that Australia would absolutely declare war against us if we robbed her of her sun and she would be right. The days when we could hector and command our Colonies are gone for ever, praise Heaven ! Let us therefore take heed lest by overdoing this reform we alienate the love of our Antipodes, and force them to compel us ignominiously to surrender our privilege of protecting them against the world.

Between Beaulieu Road and the Mill Cottage we were able to go precisely at the pace which suited us best. To-day my voice was never harshly raised against Jack and the whip stood idly in its socket. When he took it into his head to stop, we stopped too : when he moved on so did we. Our brief midday rest of five hours we took among green young birch trees in a heathery dell beside a brook. Here there was no wind at all, though we could hear it passing through the woods above us and we could watch its effect on the cloud-scape. Down in this dingle on this April day it was too hot for a jacket and, shirt-sleeved, I toiled with tube and brush to murder the innocent vegetation that surrounded me. My wife, more wise in her enjoyment of the world's loveliness, settled herself into perfect comfort and so remained, her eyes dwelling upon this and that. Señor Blasco Ivanez lay unheeded on the seat of the cart, discoursing of his bull-fighters without an audience. To-day Jack was a good donkey—for there was gorse.

About six o'clock we found ourselves—it is hard to say how—in Beaulieu, unloading the cart in front of the Mill Cottage.

It was again too late to visit the Abbey, but with several days before us this was of slight consequence.

The chicken was excellent, spatch-cocked, and the crème caramel which followed it was smooth as butter. Its sauce was blended of sweet and bitter in the exact proportions. We cleared the dish and only lest our landlady should think that we were not satisfied did we restrain one another from licking our plates.

XXV. *Of Three Great Drives.*

I

From Beaulieu we made three great drives. The first was through Lady Cross and Denny Lodge, the second was to Lepe, and the third was round the Gates. Of the first I need only say that the track marked on the map between the Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst Roads (look! it comes out by Matley Bog and thence you know your way back to Beaulieu) is a good hard road easy to find and easy to follow. It goes through the very bowels of the Forest. The growth is ordered most of the way, fir plantations chiefly, but as you near the Lyndhurst Road you get among beeches again all set on the slopes of a hill. The moor is on your right, visible through the trunks. And, one word! After you have crossed the railway you will come to a place where the road forks. We went to the right and got into trouble among boggy land, trying to cut off corners. So do you go to the left and if the road isn't good all the way to Matley give me news of it and I will handsomely apologize.

This is a track that should be passable in any weather.

II

On the day of our journey to Lepe there was a gale from the south-west, but it brought no rain

with it. We were almost unaware of its existence —for we went among thick woods (and here we saw the first bluebells)—until we came through Exbury out on to the open farm-land that slopes to the river's mouth. Here we met the wind full and strong and laden with the smell of the sea. Across the dancing water the green hills of the Isle of Wight swelled themselves up against the sky. The opposite shore seemed within hail, so clearly were the fields and houses visible. A little town heliographed a welcome to us cheerfully across the water from all its windows at once.

After our fortnight of indolence among the trees it was good to feel the stir and rush of the great ocean wind. It braced us physically and mentally. We called to mind that we were of the Island Race, inheritors of all its splendid and heroic traditions. And we knew that this donkey-tour of ours was the fruit of something better and finer than a mild desire to loaf and look at the scenery. It was The Blood, that starkly craved adventure. The Blood had driven us out to the confronting of these hardships, and we thrilled with the pride of our birth, and our eyes dwelt upon the sea with something of the conqueror's arrogance. It was ours. We dominated it. Our fathers had won it for us and so long as the Jews would lend us the money to pay Dago seamen to stoke for us, so long we would challenge the world to dispute its mastery. I doubt if a Streatham corn-chandler, witnessing a Naval Review at Spithead from the deck of an excursion steamer, could have felt a deeper emotion than

did I as that first sight of the Solent burst upon these English eyes that day at Little Exbury.

. . . . . .

Just before you come to Lepe, you pass a prodigious big house built right on the edge of the cliff. It is so large a place that my wife thought it must be a Summer Hotel and proposed that we should go and ask the price of rooms. Before doing this we consulted some little girls whom we met on the road. They advised us not to do what we proposed. They doubted very much if we would find accommodation there. It was not, they hastened to assure us, that we did not seem fit to descend at the finest hotel in the land. It was not that we were travelling in a dirty little donkey-cart and had no luggage but a luncheon basket. It was not that I looked like a tramp. It was none of these things. The house was a private dwelling, they said, and so far as they knew its inhabitants were not so lonely (living though they did out on their wild wind-swept point) as to condescend to receive paying guests. As for their financial position, our little girls could tell us nothing about that. It was understood to be a wealthy house. They doubted if we could offer enough money to induce its owners to receive us, but, of course, we could try. The butler would no doubt tell us his employers' wishes in the matter, or if the butler should be unable to answer the bell one of the footmen would give us our marching orders.

. . . . . .

Lepe is a coastguard station. Here the Beau-

lieu River joins the sea. This is all there is to say about Lepe.

. . . . . .

We lunched in the shelter of a wood and I attempted to paint some blackthorns which bloomed by the roadside. Just as I was finishing my picture a cart came by, driven by an ill-looking fellow with a shocky beard. As the horse passed my sketch he shied violently, whirled round and galloped away in the direction whence he had come, the man tearing at his mouth and volleying abuse at me over his shoulder. Presently he returned, leading his stupid beast, and hauled it past me. Then he left it shivering and came back to ask me truculently if I thought the roadside a fit place to set a-painting. I assured him mildly that I did. He mistook my gentleness for timidity and became so angry that I believe he would have proceeded to violence had I not had the happy thought to present him with my sketch. That cowed him. It showed him of what I might be capable should my blood be roused. With such brutal natures a sudden hint of real ferocity is seldom given in vain. They appreciate what more cultured minds might not even perceive. I have given pictures to enemies who have positively thanked me, wholly misunderstanding my motive. This man, without a word, left me, clambered into his cart and drove away.

I finished my sketch quickly, tore it up, and we proceeded. I thought it best not to linger in the neighbourhood. That man might have gone home to get his gun.

Crossing Beaulieu Heath, between Hugh's Common and Hill Top, Jack was so slow that I nearly broke out weeping on twenty-seven occasions. But each time my wife directed my attention from my own miseries, showing me the view or the sunset or a baby rabbit, squatted near the road, watching us pass with a large and a wary and a lustrous eye.

III

And now concerning the Gates and our drive round them.

The Gates of Beaulieu are obviously a relic of the good old times. I fancy the guide-books may have something to say in explanation of the reason for their presence. They are just the things for a guide-book to fasten on, because the people who write guide-books know that the people who buy them are unhappy if institutions like the Beaulieu Gates are left unexplained.

I think it is clear that only the good old times can be responsible for the existence of a wooden gate across every high-road within a mile of a small English village. If there was a penny to pay for going through one might see an object in the maintenance of these barriers. But they are free as the air, or they seem to be. It is possible that once a year Lord Montague, by his agents, stations himself at all these gates (for I believe they have something to do with him) and extorts a sod or a peppercorn or a faggot or a crooked groat from every person who wishes to get into Beaulieu by road, and thus some invaluable right to mow the grass that grows in the nave of the Abbey may

be maintained in his family. It will be something like that. On other days of the year the Gates exist, apparently, for no other purpose than to provide the gypsies who camp near them with a livelihood. You give them pennies for opening the Gates.

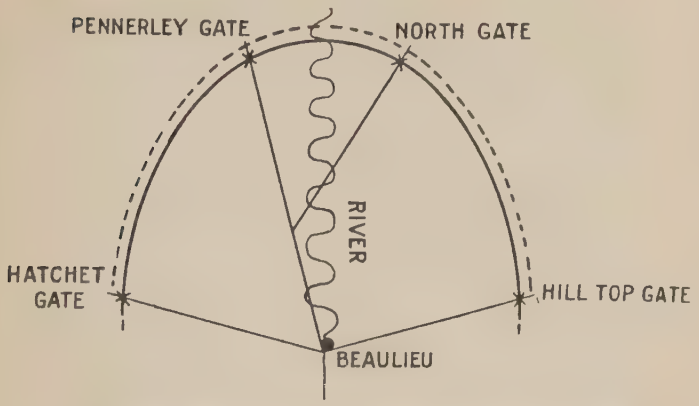
These gates remind one of those solemn posts which used to be seen in Bloomsbury, in streets down which nobody ever went. Between these posts, you will remember, chains used to be fastened at stated times. If this were not done something terrible, it was understood, would happen. I suppose the catastrophe has taken place, for those things do not seem to be in Bloomsbury any longer.

Five hundred years hence the Beaulieu Gates may go too and then we shall see what will happen. I am content to wait so long in order to discover this.

There is, at any rate, no sign of any very strong public feeling in Beaulieu about the Gates. I saw nobody addressing his fellow-townsmen on the subject. I rather think they are proud of the things. Not every town has Its Gates, nowadays. And I should imagine that very few towns at any period of the world's history had Their Gates a mile outside them. And Beaulieu will do well to be proud of its peculiarity, because it is little things like this which help to differentiate places like Beaulieu from places like, let us say, Bexhill-on-Sea.

Whatever the origin of the Beaulieu Gates may be and whatever the view which Beaulieu takes of them, it is sufficient for me that they provided my wife and myself with a most notable drive.

Look here, at this diagram.



The black semicircle represents the boundary of the dominions of Lord Montague.

The dotted one represents a forest track.

On the map the picture is not nearly so pretty and tidy, but, diagrammatically, this is the geography of the main paths north of Beaulieu.

It seems clear to me that the dotted line shows that the Forest had reason to avoid the sphere of the Beaulieu influence. The people living to the west, out beyond Hatchet Gate, when they had reason to visit their friends or murder their enemies, say at Exbury, south of Hill Top Gate, travelled two and a half miles out of their way rather than pass through Beaulieu.

I don't think the æsthetic advantages of the long route over the short can have weighed very much with them, though these are undoubted. Why, if the folk who made this track were in search of scenery, should they have stuck so

very close to the borders of the power they avoided? Why not have gone several miles further afield. The fact is that country people are just like other people; they go about their business the shortest way they can. These old roads have nothing to do with the scenery, but if you are a clever antiquarian, like me, you will probably be able very often to discover some delightfully satisfactory and probably quite erroneous explanation of the courses they take.

If you want to see this track with your own eyes, and it is well worth seeing, I advise you to adventure yourself in the westerly rather than the easterly direction. If you travel with a wife and an ass-cart you will wish to get the hardest work over at the beginning of the journey and to take it the easiest way. Thus you shall not be forced to pull ass and cart up the hill of boggy heather which rises to the east part of Beaulieu Heath but shall rather encourage the ass to descend it, which he will do quite easily.

Now I am going to be very practical and tiresome.

Drive out past the Abbey and up the long hill to Hill Top. (Were you unencumbered with an ass-cart I should send you through the Abbey grounds and so, through the oaks, straight up to the Heath by ways which you could find easily enough. You might chance upon Lord Montague's fish farm, which would give you a wonderful surprise if you didn't know about it. But in those woods the grassy roads are soft and the gradients wonderfully steep. The ass would not benefit by these things and he wants all his forces.)

Drive up, I say, the long hill to the Hill Top Gate and there you may be done with roads for a good while to come. Through the gate turn sharp to the left over the grass along the hedge, keeping all the gorse and scattered fir trees of the Heath to your right. After a little time you pass some mud cottages. Continue. A wood of oaks (which I believe is called The Noads) engages your attention. Leave it on your right and go down the hill between it and the firs. This is the place that makes it better to go westerly.

Here, I will confess, we have left the dotted line. I suggest that you explore it for yourself. I suspect that we have borne too much to the right. There was, you will remember, a place where our road forked. No matter. This is all to the good. That is something to do another time. At present we are for the King's Hat Inclosure.

Proceed. Great views towards Dibden and Marchwood—heath views.

A gate appears. Pass through it and you are in the King's Hat. I hope it is comfortable. As for us we watched three squirrels chasing each other there for half an hour.

A great grass road between firs and mixed timber. It forks. Take the right. To the left. To the right. To the right, leaving the cottage behind you. A gate and you are on the high-road to Southampton.

Whatever you do don't go there.

Turn left towards Beaulieu and soon you will see the North Gate, and beside it the green end of the old track—the track we missed—coming out

of the bowels of the wood it has crossed. I must positively go along it some day—but not now.

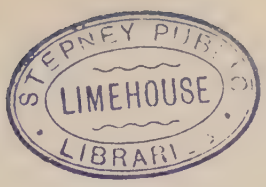
At the gate take the right again, ford the Beaulieu River, and whack the donkey over the good road that lies before you. There is no missing it. It will bring you to the Lyndhurst Road in no time, all across the south corner of Denny Lodge Walk.

In again along the road, left, towards Beaulieu, down the hill and across the little stream that runs to meet the Beaulieu River. And here, quick to the right, (praising Heaven if no motor-car has gone by while you were on the road) and in among the good trees again, safe from the smell of petrol.

Through gracious beeches, no going wrong. An open glade appears, the road broad and green through the heather. At the end of the glade the path forks. To the left with you under a gnarled little oak and so onwards, fearing nothing, up one long slope, down another and the first cottages of Hatchet Gate are on top of a third. Here ends the velvet and we are once more on the grit, bad luck to it! and so we shall be till we get to Beaulieu.

But we have had nearly five miles of unadulterated forest. The whole journey is eight.

Take all day to this. Between Hill Top and Hatchet Gate there is not one yard of the road that is not the best possible place for stopping to eat lunch and tea. And the donkey can feed all the way. And your wife will be much pleased with her journey. And, unless it is very dry weather, you will have sweated off a stone in helping the cart through the soft places.



XXVI. *Of a Nobleman and of his Tact and of my Aspirations and of a Feudal Condition of Affairs.*

From the lancet window in the sitting-room of the Mill Cottage one looks past the mill and over the bridge, and through an archway, with a clock above it, one sees the Palace House, where lives Lord Montague of Beaulieu.

Now Lord Montague is Beaulieu. Within the gates his word is law—or something like it.

I think this fact accounts very largely for the charm of the place. I have a great affection for Lord Montague, though I am not personally acquainted with him. I will tell you why.

On the second evening of our repose, in Beaulieu, from the hard business of getting on, I was painting by the river and I was making a horrid mess of it. But I was laying on the paint with great liberality and I was very happy. Suddenly a voice spoke close to me.

"Can I be of any help to you in your painting?"

"Now, dash it all!" I thought, "this is a bit too much," and I sought about in my mind for a blasting repartee. I looked round and saw a gentleman in knickerbockers regarding me benevolently.

"If you'd like to paint anywhere in the grounds or the Abbey," he said, "please do. Give my name and they'll let you go anywhere. I am Lord Montague."

I had meditated verbal savagery towards this splendid nobleman. I was utterly overcome. I babbled something about his being very kind.

"Not a bit," he said. "I'm always glad to do anything for you fellows." And he left me.

You fellows! YOU FELLOWS!!

He had ranked me with the artists. By Heaven, he had!

This amiable, this generous, this extraordinary gentleman had pretended to take me for an artist. The tact of it!

Bless him!

For a moment I had lived through the belief that I had been supposed to be an artist.

You fellows! Let me write it once again. You fellows!

I can hear him still.

With such a man to own it and guide it in its ways and teach it courtesy to strangers, is it a wonder that Beaulieu is an enchanting place? What if it giggles at people who drive behind donkeys? Let it smile, bless it!

You fellows! You fellows!!

I suppose most of us want to be something other than we are and feel sure that our best talents are being wasted. A barrister will put more force into pretending to be a soldier than ever he puts into reading his briefs, and will take more pleasure in the approval of an inspecting officer (supposing

this barrister to be colonel of his regiment) than a personal compliment from the President of an Appeal Court can ever bestow. For this same reason many benevolent men dress themselves up in fabulously ugly collars and aprons in order to be charitable. It is not enough for them to be benevolent; they must seem to be dangerous as well. By calling themselves Elks or Yaks or what-not and meeting behind locked doors, they gain the belief that they are priests of a mystery; whereas they are only honest fellows who, in a perfectly harmless fashion, combine the two highly respectable businesses of philanthropy and banqueting. The Stockbroker prides himself on his amateur acting rather than on his familiarity with the current prices of shares; the banker, who has a liking for chess, is profoundly convinced that had he been at liberty to cultivate his game to the full, he would really have cut a figure in the world.

So I, being able to do nothing at all but learn to write, must needs believe that I should have made a name for myself as a water-colour painter if I had only begun earlier. Nor is this all. I still believe that I shall do it, if only I can steal enough time from the prosecution of my legitimate trade. The results that I achieve cannot shake this belief in any way. I regard them only as so many proofs that in me a great painter is lost. And now—once more—You fellows! You fellows!!

O Peerless Peer! O thrice fortunate his dominions! Nothing would be easier, were I a radical politician, than to draw a most harrowing picture

of Beaulieu groaning under the iron tyranny of its owner. I could suggest the little village creeping timidly as far as the mill-sluice and there stopping, awestruck by the sight of the Palace House, seen through its big gateway. I could wax positively vitriolic upon the intolerable injustice of The Gates, which force free men to descend from their vehicles in acknowledgment of an obsolete and unnatural supremacy. I could heap ridicule upon the spectacle of Lord Montague walking down the village street between a double row of his servile and corrupted tenantry, all timorously bowing and scraping and pulling forelocks and abasing themselves generally to the passage of their owner, in a manner horrible to contemplate, sceptical, to a man, of the Secrecy of the Ballot, doubtful in their hearts if the Pit and Gallows Business is really done away with. Remembering that the Gates mark roughly a circular boundary to the Montague dominion I can imagine myself reaching the point where I should entitle my article, "Beaulieu, the Tenth Circle of Hell."

I prefer to think of the village in quite a different way. I see it peaceful (but for the motorists) and happy. I see smiling faces all along the street. I see no competition among the shops, no cash chemist, no ugly red-brick branch of the People's Stores Limited.

I see it blessed above villages (because of its proximity to the Palace House), with the electric-light, with a fire-engine, with water from the tap. I see Lord Montague, a kindly active gentleman in knickerbockers, going about his little paradise

with a smile for every one, a tremendous military salute for such of the boys as are Scouts, and a ready invitation to daub about in his grounds addressed to the disreputable-looking "artist" (allow me this) who alights within his quarters for a day or two. And in all those hat-touchings I will see nothing servile at all, but only the honest salute of free men to another free man, a good neighbour of theirs, who, they know, makes it his business that they shall be comfortable on his land.

I hope the people of Beaulieu know how really well off they are; but I doubt it. Not even the Gates can keep out those Radical newspapers.

. . . . . .

You fellows! You fellows!!

XXVII. *Of a Primrose Path.*

Our daily-increasing pity for the unfortunates who live in towns culminated at Beaulieu in an attempt to brighten and freshen some of those sordid lives by posting a little of the Spring to London. In other words we went primrose-picking.

My wife's fingers had been itching to be among the yellow flowers ever since we passed the Gate on the Lyndhurst Road, for it was there that we first saw them in abundance. I confess that I do not understand this desire to pick flowers. In itself it appears to me to be a savage appetite. The most extensive slaughter seems unable to appease it. Yet it invariably accompanies a genuine love for the creatures upon whose death it feeds. Is there any other case of an affection which is lavished upon its object in a similar way? I cannot think so. We should doubt the sanity of the person who explained a habit of dog-shooting by producing his card of membership of Our Dumb Friends' League, and the child-lover who should go into an Elementary School and, sitting down, should apply a scythe to the necks of as many tender infants as he could comfortably reach—such a child-lover we should view with positive aversion, as a man who held the truth in light esteem.

But upon the flower-lover at her horrible work

we bestow the smiles of our best approval. And we see nothing out of the way in her conduct. I find this strange.

I will admit at once that a great deal of pleasure is to be got from plucking primroses. Their scent is delicious and they are lovely objects. To secure them for one's own satisfies to some small degree that lust of possession which is man's greatest misfortune. Again, amidst a host of primroses one has that joy of rare quality which superabundance alone can give. If I am offered an omelette for three, though I do not want so much, I eat it all, scraping up the remnants with bread. But if it had been for twenty, though I should very likely have eaten omelette only for two, yet should I have enjoyed what I had eaten about five times as much.

So with primroses. They appear infinite in number. One is certain that one will not want more. The terror of reaching an end before desire shall be appeased is wholly absent from the feast. They are like a fresh wind on a hillside, or the stars on a clear night. As with the lungs and the eyes, assured of complete satisfaction, so with the fingers that lust for primroses. There is going to be far too much.

Beaulieu, lying snug among its wooded hills, provides the flower-lover who donkey-tours in the Forest, with her earliest great gourmandizings. It is a fertile spot. If you had never heard of Beaulieu Abbey you would, on seeing the place with its adorable situation, say, " Here should be a ruined abbey. The Ecclesiastics could not possibly

overlook such a site." The hills keep the winds away and none of them is high enough to overshadow the land; the sun gives Beaulieu full measure. It is the centre of a fat farming district, produced suddenly by a small stream in the middle of inhospitable moors. East and west spreads Beaulieu Heath in its desolation. In between lies Beaulieu, like a nut in a husk. Such a district is favourable to the flower-lover, and if her appetite be for primroses she will nowhere find a more inexhaustible banquet than on the path to Buckler's Hard.

You may find this path most quickly by going through the stable yard of the Montague Arms. When you come to fields, there it is going away from you through them. There are some stiles to cross, and presently you are at a hard whose name I never learned. (A hard is a place where barges land their cargoes.) Cross a road and you are in the right spot for primroses. They make the ground yellow. Everywhere straight rides have been cut through the woods and every ride is glorious with primroses. The scent of them is all in the air you breathe. Through the trees, now scant of leaf, you can see the estuary from time to time, blue where the fresh wind hits it and purple where, in its calm places, the wooded hills beyond it are reflected. Below the trees the primroses and anemones have it all their own way (for the undergrowth is only beginning to push) and above them the white clouds sail northwards from the Channel. Here you may spread a tablecloth on more primroses than you can carry away. It is a place to visit with your two largest baskets. And let one of them be stuffed with lunch.

Upon this very metropolis of the Beaulieu primroses we descended on, I think, the third day of our sojourn. There was to be a very great plucking; we were to wallow in primroses. All the way to the hard temptation peeped at us from below hedges or beckoned us aside to broad banks loaded with blooms. But we held on steadily. We knew what awaited us (for we had been here the day before) and not a head should fall until the Primrose Path be won. For our desire was towards a certain ride running at right angles to the through path, where we had seen primroses in such excess that no other place seemed at all comparable. There we would go: there we would fall to, slaking our thirst for flowers in one stupendous bout of plucking, for that is how we think the thing should be done. So we passed every opportunity, hurrying towards the Primrose Path, lest we be led aside and our large needs be all frittered away in preliminary snacks. We could have filled our baskets six times over before reaching the Primrose Path, but we wanted to lie down to our work. Only when one is stretched upon the earth may the true greedy love of gathering be properly rewarded.

At the entrance to the wood a gypsy boy met us. He was encumbered with magnificent primroses. He offered them to us for sale. We simply waved him aside and hastened on. He followed, praising his wares. We disregarded him. He cheapened his price to almost nothing. Still we hurried forwards. He could not have paid us to take his flowers. It seems therefore that we did not really want primroses at all. We wanted to be culling them, to be tearing them out of the

ground, to be destroying them. The gypsy, with his finer feelings, had regarded the pillage of which he had been guilty as so much distasteful labour forced upon him by the need of bread. Reluctantly he had taken these innocent lives. But we—we were flower-lovers and nothing but the ravishment of countless heads could satisfy us.

Soon the Primrose Path opened before our gloating eyes and immediately we were feeding our fell delight. With hot hands we seized them, our greedy fingers following their tender pink necks into the very earth, rending them away, bunching them together, stifling them in our baskets under heaps of their dying sisters, like corpses in a plague pit. Only the goodliest were good enough for us. We glutted ourselves daintily. Every aspiring head was doomed. Was it then that the humbler flowers learned (if they had never learned it before) the folly of the exalted horn ? Did many an unsuccessful one that day thank her Maker for an unambitious temperament ? Did sage whispers run about the beds to the effect that pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction ? The smaller flowers would tell each other, perhaps, that the wages of sin is death, and that here were the Lord's harvesters visibly at work.

Well, I would think better of the primroses. I believe them to be wise enough not to attempt the explanation of certain matters. No further than we shall they ever see into the mysteries of life and death, and they are content to know it. Nor do they waste their short time on Earth in any fruitless search for the Answer, but raising their little faces confidently to the sky, suck in air and

moisture for a few days, accepting such sweet rain or such flower-gatherers as shall fall upon them without either thanks or rebellion, and so pass, having fully tasted of life.

But not, on this account, would I be a primrose. Oh ! by no means.

I suppose we had been gathering with both hands upon the Primrose Path for a half-hour or more, when my wife said suddenly, "Here is a cat. Poor thing," she said, "it's hurt," and then, "It's in a trap." I came to see and it was so. A very hateful sight.

This cat lay quite still, staring at us with wide solemn eyes that were filled with a profound distrust of those whose aid it had invoked. For it mewed weakly now and then, a little sound infinitely pitiful, and it was this that had led to its discovery. It was caught by a front paw, and the primroses were all about it. Poor soul ! it had gone a-hunting in obedience to the law that governs cats and men and primroses alike and this was its reward. It had encountered a stronger brute than itself and must now, for its weakness, die. For that man may shoot pheasants, pheasants must be preserved and traps must be laid. And as it is obviously right that man should shoot pheasants —for were not pheasants created to be his food ? —so, there can be no question of his title to lay traps—for does not everybody know that cats are supposed to stay at home, out of the woods ?

I understood that it had been laid upon me to slay this cat. A braver or a more humane man might have taken the beast out of the trap and loosed it to limp home on three legs if it could, there to

live a cripple or be drowned by its owner. But I do not understand the machinery of gins and I greatly fear the teeth and claws of cats maddened by terror. I might have left it where it was, to await the mercies of the keeper. I might have gone my way, telling myself that this was none of my business and that the cat had only itself to blame, that its life was rightly forfeit, that the keeper would come by in an hour or two, and comforting myself by reflecting upon the advantages to humanity which the preservation of the game ensures.

But, with a sunken heart, I believed that I saw what I had to do. I desired my wife to walk on along the Primrose Path and, with my stick, I slew the cat.

I hated myself for what I had done. I hated the cat for forcing this odious deed upon me. I hated the world in which such things can be necessary. I suppose that all these hates were equally vain and that I was foolish to be troubled by what I had done. After all, it is very stupid to think. The keeper would have shot the cat and reset the trap and gone on his way rejoicing in a good deed. I, feeling like a murderer, joined my wife. We agreed that we had plucked flowers enough, and went unhappily away, homewards along the Primrose Path.

On our way the temperature fell and clouds gathered as if in compliment to our mood. Seats by a fire attracted us more strongly than the Abbey, which we had proposed to visit on our return from our primrose plucking.

We decided to inspect the famous ruin on the morrow.

XXVIII. *Of the Countess of Charny and of Other Abaters of the Rattling Nuisance.*

That night it blew a good deal and my window rattled.

Rattling doors and windows are among the major disadvantages of travel. I passed a summer once in a house in Brittany near the sea. Every door in that house rattled, not only when it blew but when people walked about in the rooms. Those doors seemed to have been adjusted on their hinges chiefly with a view to their rattling, so exquisitely sensitive were they to any kind of vibration. They were like seismographs. Each night I used to spend half an hour wedging them up with the *Countess of Charny* in six paper volumes. Whatever is to be said against the *Countess of Charny*—and there is much—it must be granted an extraordinary competence as a wedger of doors.

Dumas was a marvellous man. Not content with being the King of Romancers, not content with being the author of *Histoire de mes Bêtes*, he must needs write the book which, above all others, written or to be written, is the most suitable for the purpose of preventing doors from rattling. And he gives such good measure. You could keep a Norwegian hotel quiet with the *Countess of Charny*.

Now take a tip from an Old Traveller.

Dumas, as a preventer of the rattling nuisance, was working under a handicap. He was doing something for which he was not really fitted. He was making a *tour de force*, and *tours de force* have always the demerit of their very nature. The *Countess of Charny* is only the best set of door wedges in volume form. After it has been used for a few months it becomes intolerable, mere torn and crumpled and dirty lumps of paper. It has positively to be left behind. One cannot pack it One has to buy another six volumes of it if one would, by its means, be secure from the rattling of doors.

It is cheaper and simpler to leave Dumas and go to another merchant. A small handy carpenter will do for sixpence what at Dumas' you will pay six shillings for. And the carpenter's wedges will last you a life-time and they will be of various sizes, so that the doubling and doubling of paper will be spared to you. In a moment you shall slip in a wedge of the proper size, drive it home with your boot-toe and the odious rattle shall be stilled. No traveller worthy of the name should ever be without a set of these little aids to sleep. I have recommended them to dozens of people who have written me most appreciative letters on the subject. They say that they cannot understand how ever they used to get on without their wedges. Travel, they tell me, has become a real pleasure at last. Let the wind blow as it will, let the builders of hotels and lodgings build as jerry as they please! With my wedges, these

friends tell me, they go to bed, wherever they may be, confident in the absence, at any rate, of rattle.

I often think with pleasure of all that gratitude which I have earned in this way.

I thought of it that night at Beaulieu while the window banged about, until I got up at last in a frenzy and stilled it with one of my beautiful tree studies.

I must really have a set of those little wedges made.

XXIX. *Of a Nomad.*

Up by Hill Top there is generally a large encampment of gypsies, perhaps twenty tents of them. They are not an attractive people, but they are, I understand, harmless, though they are credited with a little pilfering when the chance comes their way. Miss Ellen has a story of certain savage gypsies who sprang out upon her and Miss Jessie as they rode their bicycles through a lonely part of the Forest, and tried to extort money by fear; but this is a very rare case, I fancy. The truth is that the Forest gypsies know better than to be troublesome; there are too many authorities about with their eyes upon them. For this Forest, though it looks in many places as if it had never known the hand of man upon it, is parcelled out to the last inch among officials of one kind and another and it is extremely hard for a wrongdoer to lose himself here. If he would escape the consequences of his deeds he must leave the Forest and bury himself in some town, and your gypsy is not happy in a town. So for sheer love of the Forest they behave themselves more or less seemly.

Many of them would rather die than leave the Forest. There was one very old woman, of whom

we heard, who came to the point of death and a doctor was brought to her. He doomed her to the hospital, and that afternoon the ambulance arrived for her. She was apparently willing to go and suffered herself to be lifted and carried to the ambulance. The doctor's only wonder was if he would get the frail old skeleton to the hospital with any breath in it. He sighed and turned away.

And lo! Even as the driver of the ambulance gathered up his reins to depart, the moribund was observable disappearing through the woods with the wide bounds of a kangaroo; nor could they overtake her. Nor have they ever been able to persuade her to come with them. She has no need of them and their hospitals, for she enjoys extremely good health and is now rising a hundred and three.

I am here reminded of an old man whom I sometimes see round about Brook. He is not a gypsy, but he is every bit as much wedded to the open air as any of them. I do not know his age, but it must be considerable. He has spent his whole life travelling the country on foot and doing any kind of odd job that turns up, and he has never had a house and he has never slept in a bed. He is the nicest imaginable old man, his smile is the smile of a young child, his voice is rich and mellow and he is, I should say, as strong as a bullock. When he wishes to sleep he just curls up wherever he happens to be, under a hedge if it is raining, for he is careful of his health. He tells me that of late years he has begun to feel an occasional twinge of rheumatism about the

shoulders and he evidently regards this as something of a disgrace. So he has acquired an overcoat for the winter months; I wonder where he keeps it during the summer? He will walk twenty miles to earn a shilling and he is never short of money. I mean he has always some coppers in his pocket. He is known all over the country south of a line drawn between Reading and Bath, and everywhere he can be sure of a bite of bread or meat and a cup of tea, and he does not care for liquor and tobacco.

If ever there was a happy man this is he.

He has the best of health.

He is very rich, in the abundance of his non-requisites.

He is free as the deer, and nobody hunts him.

He has no responsibilities.

He has nobody about whom he has anxieties.

He has no servant to insure.

He has no vote.

Everybody is glad to see him.

He can do anything in the line of the agricultural odd job and do it well.

He has no rent to pay; he has no creditors at all.

He has no "career" to prosecute.

He has no children to disappoint him.

He has no vices to tear him to bits.

He has eighty years of life to his account.

He has all the food that he wants and it is food that he likes for—

He has a good appetite.

He sleeps sound and at any moment of the day or night.

He is constantly in the Forest.

He calls the fox his brother and the hedgehog cousin.

He has no fear of anything.

He has no stocks to fall.

The Coal men and the Railway men may paralyse England : it is nothing to him.

His soul is his own and he has no troubles about it.

He has no collar. Only by reason of his possessing a shirt does he differ from the man in Anatole France's story.

I believe he has Solved the Problem.

But stop a moment. What was that item ? "He has nobody about whom he has anxieties."

No, he has not Solved the Problem.

XXX. *Of our Move on Brockenhurst.*

The only reason that I can see for not going to Beaulieu is that one has to leave it. That is to say, nearly everybody has to do this. And it is a good thing that Providence has so arranged matters, for if nobody who went to Beaulieu had to leave it, either the accommodation—consisting as it does of one hotel and the Mill Cottage—would become inconveniently crowded, or so many houses would have to be added to the place that it would cease to have any attraction whatever by becoming a suburb of Southampton.

Among those who have to leave Beaulieu we were numbered. There remained much Forest to be viewed and we had already spent seventeen days of the short month which was ours. What would Brockenhurst say to us, what Lymington, what Christchurch, what Burley, if we continued to neglect their claims upon our time? They would surely give us some evil kind of welcome; might even rain upon us; and we had not seen rain since leaving Brook. If the fine days were to stay with us we must not trifle any longer with our opportunities. It was a long cast to Brockenhurst, which was to be our next resting-place, and we wished to arrive there dry and not wet. It be-

hoved us to be stirring ere the weather break, as it must before long. Already the wind had begun to sharpen its tooth a little and clouds had overcast the sky on two successive days.

So at last we bade good-bye to the tide-mill and to the river and to the hard, we paid the butcher and the grocer for the food we had had from them and the Montague Arms for its entertainment of Jack, we settled our modest week's bill at the Mill Cottage and took our regretful farewell of its hostess, we loaded the cart and we gave our ass the word to be stirring.

"I think," I said as we went up the little grey street, "that we must add Beaulieu to the list of those places where, when we have time, we will come and settle down for the rest of our lives. The evening of our days might very well be spent also in Beaulieu."

My wife agreed, and the list now stands thus:

Cordoba.
Woodford (Wilts).
Lugano.
Canterbury.
Beaulieu.

When we go to Beaulieu finally to live we shall hope to see something of the Abbey other than its exterior, for I am told that it is well worth the sixpence that is charged for entrance.

It is a long uphill mile from Beaulieu High Street to the Hatchet Gate, and during that mile (over which the ass took all his time) the sun was lost to us behind clouds that suddenly raced up the

sky from the west. At Hatchet Gate, where we topped the hill, we met the wind in all its unsuspected force and coldness, for down there in the sheltered Beaulieu basin we had felt nothing but a certain freshness of a moderate breeze. Yet the scurrying clouds had prepared me and I was not wholly surprised to find very disagreeable weather on Beaulieu Heath. As we passed through the gate my wife was pulling golf capes and rugs from out of the bottom of the cart.

Because it was so cold we wished to-day, for once, to hurry. Perhaps Jack had wanted to go to Lymington, the road to which starts from Hatchet Gate. Never, at any rate, had he gone more slowly than this morning; several times he absolutely stopped and, with ears laid back, submitted to my strokes, unbudging. It was now that my wife invented a new way of driving asses. She stood up in the cart, reins in hand, lest Jack should stumble, and then she sent a man on ahead of Jack with a biscuit, which she directed him to hold close to the mouth of Jack and so run rapidly backwards to Brockenhurst. This was done, and the ass developed such a turn of speed that I was very nearly run over and devoured. Backwards I ran from him for my life and the cart bounded over the road, my wife calling out encouragingly to the two of us. This spurt took us about fifty yards on our way to Brockenhurst and then Jack saw through the device, halted, and refused to move till the biscuit was down his throat. We spent just sixty-two biscuits in this way and when we reached the shelter of the trees in Stockley

Inclosure, we were all thoroughly warmed by excitement, laughter, and exercise and Jack was stuffed till his harness was ready to give way from about him.

In New Copse Inclosure we lunched and it was sunny for us, which pleased us prodigiously; and just beyond our luncheon camp, where the road drops down beside Perry Wood, we met a cart driven by a man who sat all by himself in a fine white and gold drawing-room cosy-corner, upholstered in green plush, with mirrors in it and a pair of cupboards in which valuable china might be kept. Now cosy-corners are very seldom met with on the roads of the New Forest and we blessed our stars that had let us have this wonderful experience.

Then we went on into Brockenhurst and Jack's pace was the pace of a glacier.

XXXI. *Of our Entry into Brockenhurst.*

For once we had been provident. Our Beaulieu hostess had given us a taste for good lodgings as opposed to chance-come Forest inns, and we had, from her, obtained a well-recommended address in Brockenhurst. Nay more, we had exchanged telegrams with our Brockenhurst landlady and we were sure of rooms and of a stable for our beast.

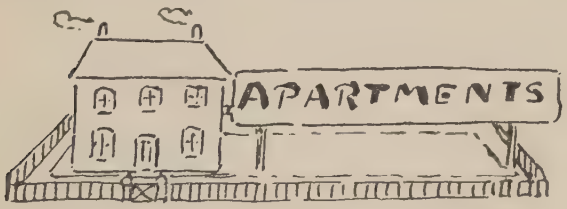
So though Jack was slower than usual we did not greatly mind, now we were out of the wind and among the trees. We let him crawl.

Brockenhurst is like a torn fish net thrown down. The Common Squatter began it, squatting, wherever he fancied a site, hither and yon over the heathland, clearing a patch, raising a hedge, building a shed and a pigsty as he could thieve timber from the Forest. In the course of time he congregated himself into three or four hamlets and joined himself together by tracks which grew into lanes among fields. At this period of its history Brockenhurst must have been quaint enough with its odd little cottages of mud and thatch cropping up in a hundred unsuspected ways among the gorse bushes.

Then came the South-Western Railway bang into the middle of all this irregularly acquired property, and because here is the only nucleus

for a town which the Railway touches on its way through the Forest and because the Forest is a playground, land at Brockenhurst suddenly acquired a value and horrible things began to happen.

This sort of thing



everywhere and anywhere.

And the elaborate pseudo-antique villas of the decently-off came too; in the Jacobean-Rural style and the Elizabethan-Woking style and the Queen-Anne-Golder's-Green style and in other styles too indefinite to classify.

These things, with the advertisements of motor-tyres and petrol, line the once charming tangle of shady lanes and winding streams and golden commons, patchily, detestably. Next door to a roof of rare old thatch, rich yellow mud walls, climbing roses and a gardenful of cottage flowers you discover some flat-faced Coronation Terrace or Mafeking Villa (red as a public-house broker) staring at you offensively over an ornamental iron railing painted bright green. You come out of the shimmer of the young leaf in Perry Wood and meet the announcement of a big boarding-house's high-class cuisine. If you arrive from Lyndhurst you mistrust your sight which tells you that a gaunt hotel has been taken bodily from a *plage* of Northern France and dumped at your wayside.

You think the gorse has dazzled you into seeing visions. The tarred road should have warned you. And look at the golfers straddling about on their greens! Yes, the hotel is there, bad scran to it!

As for the Main Street, where the shops are, its father was the Balham Parade, its mother the Avenida at Harringay, it turned out sickly and it was sent to Brockenhurst for its health.

Into this indecent agglomeration of decay and sham and anæmia we came at last, about two o'clock. It had not yet rained upon us, but every moment it seemed more and more likely to do so.

For long, in search of our lodgings, we tortuously pursued the directions of the ignorant or the malicious over the reticulations of Brockenhurst.

The house we sought was called Cholmondely. This fact added enormously to our difficulties. For some people knew how to pronounce this word and some people did not. If I asked for Chumley it was odds that the person I questioned had never heard of it and think it strange that any house in Brockenhurst should be unknown to him or to her. Then I would say Chol-mun-de-ly and the dull puzzled face would brighten and directions would begin to flow.

So I would ask the next clown for Chol-mun-de-ly and he or she would grin superior and say, "I suppose you mean Chumley!" and I would admit, raging, that I supposed I did.

At last I wrote it out on a piece of paper like one of those foreign seamen whom you encounter in Putney, looking for a relative in Islington.

But this only saved me a little annoyance. The real cause of trouble was the directions which

were given to us. All these people knew the house in question, but they all had strong views upon the shortest way to it. In a hashed-up place like Brockenhurst, I can imagine, the inhabitants must be constantly disputing about short-cuts. In the winter evenings, for instance, it will be a pastime for them. So all these people of whom I asked our way were particularly definite. And though they all grinned at the donkey, none of them seemed to notice that we had also a cart. As a result they sent us down long streets which ended suddenly upon foot-bridges over the railway line; they engaged us upon lanes which were found to be taking us entirely away from the town; they confronted us with stiles insurmountable by donkey-carts; they involved us in farmyards and gravel pits and the foundations of mushroom buildings. And they continued to laugh at us and our donkey.

The wind blew ever stronger and colder and the rain seemed always more and more imminent.

We toiled on, Jack only just not stationary and the constant passage of fools putting it out of my power to lash him. This is the only pleasant reflection that I can make upon a dreary time. I did not hit Jack. I wanted to, but I held my hand. No matter why; I held it. Allow me the solitary satisfaction of remembering that I used, at this time, no violence to our little servant.

Reduced, at length, even to indifference, I put the old, old question to a man who painted wooden railings. "Do you know this house?" I asked, handing him my paper. "It is Mrs. Judson's house," I added.

I suppose you think that I might have dropped the Cholmondely altogether and stuck to the Mrs. Judson, in a little place like Brockenhurst where everybody may be presumed to know everybody else.

Well, I had tried that too, but it was the worst thing possible. In a little place like Brockenhurst there is still room for four Mrs. Judsons, and I had been forced to resume my piece of paper.

I expected the man who was painting so busily to make me a reply of this nature:

"You goo dun thur an take secon' lane to laft, foller ahn over the small gorsy bit, keepin' away from the latter-box, but not too much. Then you'll find a grassy path, not he with the haystuck beside un but one of the other two," and so forth.

He surprised me by answering "This is it." I very nearly gave him a sovereign.

I beat upon the door and our Mrs. Judson opened it.

The moment I saw her face I knew that we were in for more trouble. Not that her face was not in every way a delightful face, for it was; but it was distressed; and the face of a landlady should not be distressed when her eyes light upon the lodgers whom she has been expecting.

Very soon we knew the worst.

The lodgers who had been expected to vacate Cholmondely that morning had declined to do so. They proposed to themselves yet another two days at Brockenhurst. Jack, then, could go to his stable at once—it was hard by—but Mrs. Judson could not receive his companions.

This was no great matter. Brockenhurst, from

what we had seen of it, appeared to be composed entirely of lodging-houses. So long as the ass's stable was secured, we could expect soon to be unpacking in shelter.

I said to Mrs. Judson, "Make your mind easy, Mrs. Judson. You shall recommend us to some other lodgings close by here, that we may be handy for our donkey. Nothing more is necessary, certainly not that you should make yourself miserable about what has happened. Just take us somewhere else quickly that we may get settled before the rain comes."

Yes, Mrs. Judson would do that and gladly. In a moment her hat was on and we were on our way to Mrs. Poulter's, where Mrs. Judson promised us comfort of a high order.

Mrs. Poulter's house was empty. A passer-by told us that she had gone to Southampton, but would be back by five, if we could wait till five. It was then three.

Mrs. Judson, still full of kindness and enthusiasm and anxiety to atone for the disappointment that had been inflicted upon us, suggested Mrs. Tonbridge. We were enthusiastic for Mrs. Tonbridge.

Mrs. Tonbridge's house was empty. Mrs. Judson, after an exploration of the back premises, reported the presence of Mrs. Tonbridge's milk jug outside the back door. She shook her head over the milk jug. It appeared to be a sign to her that Mrs. Tonbridge had gone away for an enormous length of time.

"Well," I said, "what now?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Judson, "what now?"

She bit her lip, looking about her desperately. Would she never get rid of these terrible people and their ass-cart? I could see her eyes travel from one house to another all round the little Common where we stood. Into which of them could she thrust these importunate strangers? I could see her thinking of her cooking that was all going to the devil together in her kitchen, of her child that was burning itself to death in the fire.

A spot of rain fell upon my nose.

"What now, Mrs. Judson?" I said. We were far from any hotel and it was in this end of Brockenhurst—near my donkey's stable—that I proposed to lodge—and soon.

"That way," she said, turning her hunted eyes here and there, "they're all full. Westonhaugh goes out to-morrow and Fielding House a Friday. And Homeland's went this morning, but she's not ready again. And Qu'appelle's empty too, but she'll be full to-morrow. I do wish," she said bitterly, "that Mrs. Poulter hadn' gone to Southampton."

Suddenly she gave a little exclamation. A young woman wheeling a perambulator approached. "Have *you* anybody, Mrs. Burley?" she asked. "This lady and gentleman——"

Mrs. Burley considered us and shook her head. She was empty, it appeared, but she couldn' possibly get ready. We suggested that our requirements were few, that we asked for nothing but a fire and some tea till seven o'clock. But she still shook her head. She couldn' possibly get ready. Frenzy began to lay hold of me. Another woman came up, wheeling another perambulator.

The child within was crying. The child in Mrs. Burley's perambulator woke up and joined in.

Mrs. Judson appealed to this second woman. By this time there was a light in Mrs. Judson's eye that I did not like; yet she was unfailingly kind and anxious to help. The second woman was most unsympathetic. The presence of a donkey seemed to put everything in a funny light to her. She had no suggestions to make, but she did go so far as to say that it was a pity Mrs. Poulter had gone to Southampton.

We had now drifted back to Mrs. Judson's house, and my wife at this point, with a stifled cry, drew our attention to the fact that Jack had devoured several inches of Mrs. Judson's newly painted wooden railings.

While we were saying what had to be said a large man suddenly appeared among us. He had a fiery face and a watery eye.

He said, "That donkey's got a stone in his foot."

"Indeed?" I said, mastering my passionate desire to strike this giant. "Which one is it?"

He told me. "Either the near hind or the off hind, I forget which."

Assuming my most horsy manner, I stooped down and picked up one of Jack's hind feet.

The man snorted and said that he had said the other one.

Less horsily I made round the cart and attempted to pick up Jack's other hind foot. He kicked out violently and my hand remained void of foot. After an attempt or two I secured it and there was a very devilish flat stone wedged into the shoe.

My blood ran cold. How long had it been there ? I asked myself.

The man, answering my thought, said that very like that stone had been in that poor donkey's foot a week or more. This was not the case, for the day before I had practised that art which I had recently acquired from Miss Ellen, the art of cleaning out a donkey's feet with a little stick. But I had not done it that morning. In the grief and excitement of departure from Beaulieu I had forgotten to do this thing. For donkey-driving, like everything else worth doing, is not learned in a day and the instincts of the driver had not been acquired in my couple of weeks. But I blame myself.

The man asserted roundly that the stone had been there for a week. He pointed out that it had been there when I arrived with my donkey. The poor animal, he said, was as lame as lame while I drove it past his house. I began to sweat in my gaiters. I was sick and sorry. I had put torture upon Jack, our good comrade of so many happy days. I had not known enough to see that he limped.

The man said that the stone had been in that poor donkey's foot for a week. He told us of a man—by implication another ignorant fool—who had asked him what could be the matter with his horse to make it go lame for four days. There had been a stone in the horse's hoof all the time, of course. That was the kind of thing that happened when horses and donkeys got into the wrong hands.

It was evident to me, to all of us, that this person looked upon me as a callous scoundrel

who cared nothing if he lamed a hireling donkey or so. I found it impossible to figure in any other light. The women who looked on cast glances of hatred at me.

All this time I was trying to get the stone out of Jack's hoof with my little penknife. It would have been impossible to do this had I amputated the hoof first. As Jack kept on kicking it was even more difficult.

The man said that obviously the stone had been in that poor donkey's foot for a week. He said it was a wonder the poor creature hadn' been lamed for life. He told us about barbarities which had been inflicted upon asses of his acquaintance. He also said that the stone had been there for a week.

By this time more women were present, and the man who had been painting Mrs. Judson's railings, he was with us. And there were several children, giggling together in the background and telling each other that the stone had been a good week in the poor donkey's foot.

At last I said, "Well, see what *you* can do." I very nearly added, "And be damned to you!" But I wanted Jack relieved.

The man bent down and took hold of Jack's ankle firmly. Jack lashed out as before. The man uttered a horrible sound, part grunt, part roar. No doubt it was one of those horse-words of which Mr. Borrow tells us. At any rate Jack became like wax in his hands. The fellow demanded a hammer. While Mrs. Judson went in search of one he pointed out the stone to anyone who cared to examine it and said that it had been there

for a week. Worn all flat with the shoe, it was. It had been in that poor donkey's foot for a week. It had, he said, been in that poor donkey's foot for a week. It was a wonder the beast wasn' lame for life. He supposed it had gone all over the Forest with that stone in its foot, he shouldn' wonder.

I asked him how long he thought the stone had been in the donkey's foot. He said that it had been there as much as a week.

The hammer arrived and he knocked the stone carefully out. I will say this much : he knew what he was doing. When the stone fell into the road he picked it up and showed it to us and said that, from the condition of its exterior surface, he deduced that it had surely been a week in that poor donkey's foot. He then turned it over and told us of the dire things which would have happened to the sensitive frog of the hoof if the stone had been sharp and jagged inside, instead of smooth and flat. He said it had been in the donkey's foot for a week.

I thanked him sincerely. I did not like to offer this humanitarian any money for what he had done. He pitched the stone away with a snort of contempt. I felt that he had pitched me away, but I was glad to see the stone projected into the obscurity of a gorse bush. He departed, grumbling inarticulately. My wife ran after him and gave him half a crown. I suppose he did not like to offend her by refusing it. His indignation had been so righteous that he must have had a mind superior to the minds of his class. I think the acceptance of that money was a rare piece of delicacy.

I am really obliged to him for what he did.

But the stone had *not* been there for a week.

After this I didn't care what happened to me; but my wife must have a lodging. I had grown very despondent during my late trial, but it behoved me to play the man, shake off despair and provide shelter for this poor soul who had linked her destinies with my own.

"What now, Mrs. Judson?" I said briskly, hoping to revive her interest in us. Mrs. Judson spread her hands apart. The resources of Mrs. Judson were at an end. I was glad that Jack had eaten her railings. A gorse bush for the night was evidently to be our portion.

The First Woman with Perambulator suddenly had pity upon me. She avowed a suspicion of the whereabouts of one Betty. Betty, it appeared, took lodgers, and Betty was empty. Betty was also at some place to which the perambulator was to be wheeled—a common aunt's, I think; a birthday celebration, I fancy. The only question unsettled was Betty's ability to get ready for us. The First Woman with Perambulator would seek out this Betty and if Betty was prepared to condescend to the extraordinary labour of getting her house ready for us, the First Woman would borrow the bicycle of a certain Edith and return incontinent to us with the good news. If not, not. We were to wait twenty minutes. If at the end of that time——

I signified a grudging assent to this kindly offer of a total stranger. It was evident to me that Betty would not be there, that she would see us hanged before she would leave her aunt's junket-

ing in order to attend to her business by getting ready for us. I also knew that Edith's bicycle would be punctured and that Edith would have taken it away for the day and that Edith had sold it that morning. I knew, in short, that all this would come to nothing. But I agreed. It was a straw I clutched.

So we drifted hopelessly out on to the Common to wait, and Mrs. Judson went indoors to wash her hands of me, like a wise woman.

My wife said, "I will walk about and warm myself."

"Do," said I. "Do."

My wife departed. I remained by the ass, with one eye up the road for Edith's bicycle and the other seeking among the gorse bushes for the one most suitable for our requirements. Jack had no trouble in finding one for his.

The wind whistled dismally and chill over a dreary world.

Geese came and hissed their insolence at us. Swine came, grunting derision. Three little children came and whispered their innocent curiosity about that which the man in the donkey-cart might be muttering so rapidly to himself. I thought I overheard one of them telling the other two that I had kept the stone in the poor donkey's foot for a week.

Twenty minutes passed and all my perceptions became dead.

Suddenly alarm seized me. My wife had not returned. What had happened to her? I remembered that a sense of locality is entirely lacking to her. Had she lost herself in this maze of lanes?

Was she even now asking her way from the devils who inhabited this village, back to my side? And the mackintoshes and the umbrella were in the cart. At any moment torrential rain might fall. Should I go in search of her, abandoning Jack to be devoured by the geese and swine and children? or should I stay here in terrible inaction, courting insanity? She might be half-way back to Beaulieu by this time. She might have strayed into the woods. She might have fallen into a morass and even now be sinking out of sight. And she had on her thin boots.

I began to look so wild that the children went away. This was my only comfort.

Suddenly I saw her. She was dancing over the sward, she was waving her hands and smiling. She was swaying her body about and capering and uttering glad encouraging sounds.

I thought: "She has gone mad with misery. This will teach me to come donkey-touring again."

When finally she had bounded quite to my side, she surprised me by saying, "Come along." I saw no reason to leave the spot on which I stood. It was no worse than any other place.

I looked at her dully. "That woman . . ." I said, "Edith's bicycle. . . ."

"I gave her twenty minutes," said my wife, "and then I got some nice rooms for us. They're getting tea ready now."

I am proud of the fact that I saw Jack comfortably housed before I ate and drank.

All the heroes of Romance behave like that with their horses.

XXXII. *Of an Abduction.*

The sun came back to us next morning. Jack with his injured foot must have a day of rest. We resolved on a very short excursion, a long loaf in the woods.

Setting out from Jack's stable in the direction which would most certainly take us away from the house of the man who had told me that the stone had been in that poor donkey's foot for a week, we soon found ourselves at the Balmer Lawn Hotel, where the golfers and motorists were just struggling out of doors, gorged with breakfast, to smoke their pipes and banded cigars and strut and to tell each other about their handicaps and their adventures with rural constables. We hurried away and were soon among the trees. Ten minutes later we had pitched our day's camp; Jack was relieved of the shafts, my wife tucked up in the cart, and I somewhere else with a Whatman board resolutely gripped between my knees.

Said my wife, after an hour and a half, "I am going to walk about a little. I see wild hyacinths over there."

"Don't go out of sight," I warned her over my shoulder as she went away. I laid a skilful brushful upon my middle distance and told

myself that this was going to be the very best picture I had ever painted.

When I had finally and without hope convinced myself that it was impossible for me to make that upon which I had been engaged any worse, I stretched myself, sighed for another misspent morning and peered about for my wife. She was nowhere to be seen. I looked at my watch. The time was seventeen minutes past one, long after our lunch time. I hullooed, listened, and went pale, for the humming stillness of the wood was unbroken by any answering call. I started up and ran along the path down which she had gone. I came to a gate. I went through it and hullooed, listened and ran on, calling. I ran for half an hour. I lost myself. I ran and called. I ran in circles. My voice gave out. I found myself again, thanks to a gamekeeper's gallows. I made my way back to the donkey—and found him alone. It was now past two o'clock. I will say no more about my sensations than that they were indescribably dreadful. If you have ever lost a wife in six square miles of trees and know her to be not a very stout walker, you will understand how I felt; if not, not.

What I had dreaded for nearly a month had come to pass.

I sat down and considered what I must do. Any further random running and calling could only be futile; this thing had to be tackled in no random spirit. A plan—that was what was wanted; coolness, intelligence, confidence, these were what I must summon to our aid.

My intelligence suggested that I should track my wife by her spoor; surely there could not be very many such shoeprints, as those she would leave, to be discovered in this part of the forest. This was what my intelligence suggested. My coolness told me that there was not the slightest doubt that I would probably, perhaps, not fail to become an accomplished tracker all in a minute. Thus cheered, I looked about for a heel-print on the path along which she had gone away, found one, and, crouching over the earth, set forth upon my first bit of sleuthhoundship. I found it unexpectedly easy; for the path was not very grassy and at every yard or two, on the bare damp earth, the print of the small shoe was clearly to be seen. Yet knowing, as I did, how much of thoroughness my task demanded, I went slowly along, always stooping, always with my eyes on the ground. Presently into the range of my vision came a pair of boot-toes, the rest of the boots followed, then the beginning of a tweed skirt. Hands then laid hold of my head, I found my progress impeded, and my wife's voice said, "You should have a man in front with a red flag." I looked up and knew that I had not suspected myself wrongly of an instinct for scouting. My wife stood before me. Her arms were full of dead rushes.

"I saw you," she said, "grovelling along and came to see what you were doing. Were you after a mouse?"

"A mouse be blowed!" I said. "Where have you been? You were lost."

"Yes," she said, "for a little while." She sighed. "Come and eat," she said.

"What are you sighing at?" I asked. "A little joy would be more seemly, one would think."

"If I'm sad," she said, as we went back to the cart, "it's because I've just said good-bye to a friend. We are, it appears, to see Charles no more."

"Did he find you and bring you back?" I asked.

"He sent me back," she said, "and I suppose he found me, but he lost me in between."

"Explain yourself," I said.

"Well," she said, "he slipped out on me suddenly from behind a tree, while I was picking hyacinths and said that he could take me to a place where they grew twice as big as where I was. Close by it was, he said. I looked over to you and you seemed busy and happy, so I thought I'd accept his offer and told him to lead on. I liked the idea of eloping with Charles on a flower-picking expedition.

"We set off, at once, quickly, I don't know in what direction, and soon, sure enough, we came to a bit of the wood where tremendous hyacinths were growing. I've never seen anything like them. And they were all colours, pink and white and yellow as well as blue. It was as exciting as being in a dream, and I began to pick as if I were possessed till I had an armful, and all the time I kept wondering how this unimaginable treasure of hyacinths had remained undiscovered by the Brockenhurst flower-pickers, and indeed by all flower-pickers,

for it was evident that no one had ever come that way before me. I thought how I was going to cover myself with glory by producing these unknown varieties before the eyes of English botanists, and I named the yellow ones after you and the pink ones after me, and the white ones after Charles. And all the time Charles kept drawing my attention to new beds of flowers, luring me on further and further into the wood. At last I was tired of picking and I said, 'Shall we go back to William now and have lunch?' At that Charles suddenly looked very guilty and blushed and hung his head, and he said, '*Must* 'ee go back to William?' I said, Of course I must. You'd be wondering where I was. Then he looked guiltier than ever and said, 'Ah, but 'ee *can't*.' 'Oh,' I said, 'but I *will*.' Then he informed me that I didn't know the way back, which was perfectly true. With that I began to be firm with him and told him to take me back to you at once, but the poor little soul said, No, he wouldn't. He wanted me to stay with him and be his mother. Did you ever hear the like? He had mother-napped me.

"I began to tell him that I belonged to you and that you'd be getting alarmed if I didn't come back and that he was a very naughty faun to try to steal me from you; but he only said that you had Jack, but that he didn't have no mother nor nobody to be nice to him, and that he wanted me to stay and live with him and never go away from the Forest no more. He didn't seem to care about your alarm in the slightest. He has a very simple

nature, I'm afraid. I suppose that living so much with rabbits and badgers has blunted his finer feelings and made him selfish. At any rate I couldn't get him to see your side of the question at all. He said the summer was coming on, and that it was going to be a particularly fine one, and he told me of a big hollow oak in Bolderwood where we should live, and of a store of chestnuts, hazelnuts and beechnuts which he had near by it, so that I needn't be afraid of ever being hungry. He promised to teach me to play the panpipes and to speak the bird and beast languages. Oh! I can't tell you half the inducements he held out to me to leave you. He promised me as many sloes as I could eat."

"And you preferred me?" I cried, overwhelmed by the compliment that had been paid me.

"Yes," she said, "but his disappointment nearly broke my heart. He wept most miserably when at last he understood that I would rather live in houses with you than in hollow oaks with him. 'I thought 'ee loved me, Susan,' he wailed. I told him that I did love him, but he wouldn't be comforted. Evidently he doesn't admit the possibility of degrees in affection. That's his environment again. A bird or a beast, I suppose, has only room in its heart for one other than itself at a time—its mate. All the rest are enemies —except the family for a week or two.

"I wanted him to come back to you and have lunch, but he wouldn't. 'No, Susan,' he said, as he dried his eyes on a dead leaf. ''Tis me or 'tis William; and it isn't me, seemingly. I can't

abear to see 'ee go off with he, so all is over betwixt you and I. I'd ruther live all alone than shayer 'ee with any ole William. 'Tis how I'm made, Susan,' he said. 'And now I'll send 'ee safe back to 'un since I cayn't have 'ee for my mother.'

"He whistled and a robin came flying at once and perched on his shoulder. He gave it some instructions and then he said to me, 'Foller thicky lil bird, then, and 'ee'll come out all happy and gay beside William and the sandwichers. And so, good-bye, Susan. 'Ee'll see I no more; never no more; and I'll just have t' do without motherin'.'

"He turned sadly away and began to walk from me through the wood. His tail, which has always been so perky, drooped, his prick-ears lay back along his head and he dragged his hooves in the most depressing fashion. I ran after him and kissed him and told him that it wasn't my fault but that it was the way I was made, too, and that if only he'd be friends with the two of us I should be ever so glad. He gave me a great hug and cried awhile on my shoulder; then suddenly he let go, and skipped high over a blackberry bush and was out of sight in a moment. I called good-bye after him but he never answered.

"I stood for a long time staring after him and wishing that it could have been otherwise until something pecked me lightly on the ankle and, looking down, I saw the robin, looking up at me. It was evidently anxious to get its job done, and as I felt that I mustn't trespass more than was absolutely necessary on the time of this stranger,

I told it to show the way and I would follow. So it flew off, settled on a twig and looked round for me, and when I came up with it, it flew on a little further, and so, little by little, it led me out of that unknown wood until we came in sight of you bent double and crawling along the path. Then the robin chirped loudly and flew away." My wife's story was ended.

"And where are all those fine pink and yellow and white hyacinths?" I asked.

"Why," she said, "here!" and held out to me the dead reeds she carried in her arms.

"They're dead reeds," I said.

"Why," she cried in dismay, "so they are."

"What about lunch?" I asked.

XXXIII. *Of a Drive by Vinney Ridge.*

I

I DELIGHT in a map; it is for me the most suggestive of human inventions. Would I return to some choice place, I have only to unfold the one-inch Ordnance-sheet and I am there. My wife regards a map as I regard a table of logarithms; it says nothing to her. She finds it a meaningless arrangement of lines and colours and names. My wife has the enviable faculty of being able to see places which she has visited without any aid other than her own memory. I am less lucky. Yet with a map I can make out well enough. I suppose the eye of my memory needs support from my physical one. This is to confess to a low kind of imagination, but, equally with the man who is proud of his advantages, he is a fool who is ashamed to own his disabilities.

The line of my nose is not all that I could desire, but I do not blush for it; nor am I elated because my legs are both the same length. Here my luck was out; there it was in. I had no say in the matter at all. So I record, unblushing, that as my physical eye needs a pair of spectacles in order to see at all, so my mental one can do little or nothing without a map or some such far-off view of the place that I would remember. When I

travel north through Fife I am always at the window of the carriage while the train passes Leuchars Junction, and if Heaven, smiling upon me, withholds fog and rain from the East Coast that day, I catch one glimpse of St. Andrews, five miles away across the estuary of the Eden. It is no more than a smudge of grey upon a dull grey landscape, a few old towers above a drift of smoke, but it is enough for my purpose, and once again I am in the beloved little city, robed gloriously in scarlet, squandering with both wanton hands the marvellous riches of youth. With a plan of St. Andrews I can be just as happy, strolling with Barclay up and down South Street, at eleven o'clock of a sunny morning, bowing to the ladies right and left, intensely conscious of my importance to our social life, or groping my way, at a much earlier hour, into the teeth of a black January North-Easter, out to the pier-head with a dozen other revellers, there to cool our brows and sing Gaudeamus before retiring for the night.

Yes, with a map I am fairly independent both of time and of space. An invention which can do so much for a limited lump of clay is worthy of all praise.

So now, as I pore over my plan of the Forest, it is as if, from miles aloft, I look downwards with a bird's eye (an eagle's, I think) upon all that fair country where my wife and I wandered with our donkey throughout that marvellous April that ushered in the most marvellous summer in my recollection.

I seem to see us creeping like insects upon those red lines covered with pencil that are the roads we travelled. I follow our progress from Brook to Emery Down, from Emery Down to Beaulieu Road, from Beaulieu Road to Beaulieu and from Beaulieu to Brockenhurst; again Charles gets us out of a hole, plays for the dancing rabbits, plots my destruction; again the organ-grinder becomes visible, dejected by the instrument of his choice; again the black dog barks and gambols upon Matley Bog; and again I stand with open eyes while the cosy-corner drives past me. And as I read again those names that were then unknown to me—Pig Bush and Yew Tree Heath, Allum Green and Balmer Lawn, Five Thorns Hill and Wilverley Post—with each the memory of a fair scene revives and I sit envious of those lucky two who wander perpetually down there in such country and such weather.

Of all the loops in that black-red tangle, there is one which, every time I look at it, most surely makes me long to jump suddenly back and set my feet upon its beginning and again tramp it, with my wife by my side and my donkey between the shafts.

Come, let me try to do it, and do you come along.

II

If you would make this drive with a donkey you must give the day to it, for there is not much less than thirteen miles of it, there are many hills, and your beast will need much repose during the journey. But if you will afford him an easy time

on the day before and take a feed of corn with you, you will do it comfortably enough and the ass will have no great reason to complain.

We left Brockenhurst about ten o'clock by the road which is called, I think, the Rhinefield Road. It leaves Brockenhurst, at any rate, in a north-westerly direction, and, as you will have a map, you will find it easily enough. Look, it borders Butts Lawn, on the south.

As we moved imperceptibly (for Jack had, by this time, given up trotting altogether) along the side of this Butts Lawn, behind us came a white fuzzy she-ass that pulled the neatest of little donkey-chairs, mounted on rubber tires, its polished paint and silver shining bravely in the sun. A young boy of the upper classes drove this ass; he was dressed in Irish tweed and wore a big Eton collar over his jacket. He glanced, as he rattled by at six miles an hour, with a condescending smile at our disreputable little turn-out, and raced ahead some hundred yards. There he halted, turned, and came swinging past us again. I hoped we had seen the last of him, for the pace at which his ass moved was enough to make an angel green with envy. But no. In another moment this abominable boy was returning to annoy us with his superiorities. He passed, smiled, turned and passed again. This he did once more and then, tiring of the sport, clucked to his beast and raced from our sight. A more objectionable boy I have never seen. He will come to a bad end, but I hope not before he has read these words. I sometimes wonder if that white she-ass could have

been that same Jinny which Miss Ellen bought and was obliged to discard because of her habit of lying down in front of motor-cars. If it could only be so, and if that boy could be in his wheeled chair when she did her favourite bit of business! I would like him to get a good fright. For his life I do not fear. He will not be run over by any car, just as he will not be drowned.

Having suffered under the insolence of this lad we passed on along the Rhinefield Road and soon had shaken off the last of the bricks and mortar of Brockenhurst and were out on the rolling moor, where is the rifle range. The land was all desert save for a few tun-bellied forest ponies. Their long-legged, bearded foals gave us the greatest pleasure to watch. The day up here was still and hot and I smelt thunder in the air.

Nobody being about we indulged our singing propensity to its utmost and so, after one of Jack's geological periods of travel, we dropped down upon the little Ober Water and mounted from it in among the trees again. Here midges came upon us, but we sang to them and they went away. So on, through cathedrals of tall old pines where the croziers of the bracken were all starting through the winter's litter; through beeches, now in the very heyday of their greenest time; out into glades, where the grass land fell away to the woods and wide folded distances of blue were visible above and between the clumps.

Then came a gate and beyond it a surprise—a noble avenue of conifers like the drive through some wealthy Scotsman's park. These are really

monstrous trees, and I have only seen their equal in Bolderwood and perhaps not even there. This avenue is a thing not to miss; it begins at the Black-water and it continues all through Vinney Ridge to the Lyndhurst–Christchurch Road, a clear mile of it. And it is a landmark for miles around, for it stands high, to begin with, and its trees touch the heavens.

In one respect it differs from a Scottish nobleman's carriage drive; I mean in the surface of its roadway, which is very soft. But this keeps out nearly all the motor-cars, so no harm is done. We met one of the infernal machines at the further end. Heaven send it was soundly bogged before it won through!

We lunched and rested Jack just inside the gate beyond which is the Lyndhurst–Christchurch Road. I made a sketch to tear up and my wife worked at her Spanish in a light hammock which Jack's fidgetiness has compelled us to add to his burden. She tells me that as a study it is a great improvement on the donkey-cart. She never waked at all between one o'clock and three.

At this point we had returned to known ground, for we were within a few minutes' walk of the Knightwood Oak. Just across the road was the gate which led into Knightwood and so through Mark Ash to Bolderwood. And to the right the road ran to Lyndhurst or, by the Forest track of which I have told you, to Emery Down. In twenty days we had made a ring in the Forest twenty-six miles long. We went to tell the Knightwood Oak of our achievement; it congratulated us, wished us

good luck and we left it to turn our faces along the base of the big triangle that we were that day to cover.

Between Vinney Ridge and Markway Hill the great Christchurch Road swings up and down for three miles, first through firs, then through beeches, and lastly over moors. In all this distance we saw but one man, and he sold us oranges. We ate them under Markway Hill, by the Ober Water, which we recrossed here, and we got rid of the skins by passing them down the throat of Jack. This is a much better plan than that usually followed of throwing them about at the side of the road.

The steep ascent of Markway Hill, though attended for me by considerable exertion, was performed by the expedition, without accident, and I think the little rest from pulling did Jack good.

And now we turned round and lo! all the High Woods lay spread before us: Burley Walk, Irons Hill Walk, Denny Lodge Walk, Mark Ash, and Knightwood with Bolderwood above them (its great firs topping all), Vinney Ridge and Pound Hill, Lyndhurst Hill and The Queen's Bower, Rhinefield Sandys, Aldridgehill, and Denny and Parkhill and Pignal and Hawkhill—all the High Woods that clothe the twelve miles from Bentley Arch to Hatchet Gate. The firs of Burley New Inclosure formed a long black base for the gold and green and rust and purple of the trees beyond, the oaks and the birches and the late beeches and the shadows among their innumerable stems.

All this lay in gloom and above the whole northern sky was ink, streaming easterly into bronze-green; over the black moved little white wreaths, eddying eastwards; and, as we looked, the sun, slipping a ray between the clouds, touched into green fire all the young leaf on the crest of Rhinefield.

But Markway is a high place and the cold wind drove us onwards long before we were willing. We reluctantly dragged Jack from a hearty meal of gorse or gravel or whatnot, and we were only just in time to save a telegraph pole on which he had his eye.

At the Wilverley Post our heads turned homewards and soon we came to the Naked Man. I had marked this name on the map, and it had suggested to my carnal mind a public-house, tea, and repose. I had been keeping myself up for a long time with the hope of the pleasant sanded room, the long deal tables and benches, the wainscoted walls and rough honest cleanly fare of the Naked Man. I had not shared these hopes with my wife because I had a doubt. Could this age tolerate a sign so frankly impolite? Would not the Licensing Bench have insisted upon a change, years ago, to some commonplace Crown or Wagon of Hay or Bolt in Tun? I did not dare to expect a Naked Man Inn. But I hoped, oh, how I hoped! For Markway Hill is a tall hill.

When we came to this Naked Man it was only a dead tree. It bore a sort of grotesque resemblance to a human figure, or more truly a horned devil, but if it had been another Apollo Belvedere,

it would have been a disappointment. We had wanted a public-house, and now we knew that there was nothing of the kind before Brockenhurst. So we did our best mile an hour past this Naked Man and left him behind us, there by the cross roads at Wilverley Post, with his back to the view and his ugly horns on his head, and we went hungrily and thirstily along the edge of Wilverley Plain and so down a rough road over Hincheslea Moor.

And here we quite forgot our chagrin at the Naked Man and our distance from tea, for all the way the Sun and the Cloud Artist co-operated for our enthralment, working miracles over the miles of forest that lay to the north, sponging out beautiful golden high lights across the moor and stringing topazes and emeralds and cornelians across the jet of the fir plantations. The light lay long on Lyndhurst Hill, as if it caressed there a heap of these jewels.

And so on—over the last two miles of heathland, where the herds of ponies ran in circles on the turf as if it were a Musical Ride they were doing without riders and without music, till, as the sun set, the houses of Brockenhurst closed in on either hand and this great day came at last to an end beside a cheerful fire with a good dinner under our belts.

XXXIV. *Of a Poor Old Novel.*

Next morning as I came back from the Brockenhurst post office I stopped outside a bookseller's, my eye having been attracted by a shelf of those pathetic disappointed volumes which, at reduced prices, still maintain the struggle for existence. I approached them and pityingly surveyed them. Among them was one which especially engaged my attention. The others wore modest old clothes—dark blue, maroon, olive-green—sober hues which did not misbecome their fallen state. Decayed gentlewomen, perhaps, but gentlewomen to the very jaws of the pulper. From among them the book at which I gazed started out in an indecency of dirty orange. Though obviously on her last legs she outshone with ease all her comrades in distress. She reminded me of some tawdry poor soul whom sheer hunger has driven from Piccadilly into the queue outside a soup-kitchen. Her shelf was not quite filled and she leaned drunkenly against a slim, dove-grey *Bridge and How to Play It*, while her feet were pressed against those of a History in rusty black and silver, the history of a scandalous court. These, her two respectably gowned neighbours, seemed to draw away from her.

I had the brutality to compare her ticket with the tickets of the others. "Published at six

shillings," I read. "Offered at ninepence." She was the cheapest thing there and fallen the furthest. Even the three-shilling-nett book on Bridge had not come below one and twopence, while the half-guinea scandalous history still bid boldly for as much as three and four. I discovered an infinite pathos in this circumstance. How desperate must be the condition of a book which, not content with so grossly underbidding her rivals, did it with so loud, so outrageous, so orange a clamour!

"Oh!" she seemed to shriek, "buy me, kind gentleman, buy me, for Goodness' Gracious' sake. If you think I ask too much I'll gladly take less. Spring a tanner and I'm yours for ever. Insult me with an offer of three d, and I'll jump out of this shelf right into your arms. Only take me away out of here, where they throw my situation in my face all the time. It's more than paper and boards can stand to have this cheap three-bob thing passing her remarks across me to this old wreck in black and tin. You wouldn't believe the things they say—and they no better than they should be, neither! *I* never did any harm to anybody. If I am a bit dressy, I can't help it. It's the only clothes I ever had. I was young once and thought I was somebody and was going to do something. I wanted to do it as smart as I could. I thought I was worth anybody's four and six then, and I made up my mind to be seen and bought and make a sensation. I don't see anything wrong in that. It's only business, isn't it? But if I'd known I was coming here I'd have dressed in a lower tone. They've no mercy for anyone on The Shelf who looks as if she's tried to cut a

dash in her time. Most of 'em seem to have dressed, when they came out, with an eye to this place. I wish I had, that I do. It's all very well to think big of oneself when one's young and fresh, but oh ! dear gentleman, it makes the drop twice as hard to bear."

Pitying her, I took the poor thing out of her shelf and opened her. Instantly her neighbours put their heads together, whispering maliciously.

" I'd rather," the dove-grey one was saying, " rot to pieces where I stand than descend to that sort of thing. Suffer your lot in silence, dear, that's what I say. Keep your self-respect at any cost."

" Yes," said the black and silver kindly, " I'd try to do that even though I came down to one and two, dear."

" It isn't," the book in my hand continued, " it isn't that I'm afraid of being pulped—everybody's pulped sooner or later unless you're a Breeches Bible or something of that kind. Send me straight to the pulper's if you please, only buy me and take me away out of this. I don't mind starting out as clean white paper again. They can't easily print anything worse on me than they have. I'll take my chance of that, sir, and gladly. It would get me out of this cover at any rate, and it's this cover that's killing me here. If I could have my real wish I'd be made into a Warning to Novels Not to Come Out Too Gaudy ; then I might be happy again. For we books don't think. All we want to do is to sell in hundreds of thousands and lots of us fancy that a swanky cover'll help. We've heard of the Competition of the Bookstall and we want to give ourselves a chance.

We may have heard of The Reduced Shelf but when you're young you think failure's only for other people, and when, at last, you come to The Shelf the last thing that surprises you is to find *yourself* there. You're so busy looking about you and seeing the reasons for the others being on it. But oh! when you wake up at last, it's a dismal eye-opener.

"And there's another thing—the number of disappointments you get. When you've got a cover like mine, people pull you out now and then. They never mean to buy you, never. All they want to do is to waste five minutes, messing the poor old books about. A person'd rather chuck his money into the gutter than spend it on the likes of us. But it amuses them to turn us over and read a page or two and sneer and put us back again.

"Well, my cover catches their eye—it does that all right—and they have me out very likely first of all, just as you've done. In the old days when I was new and lived in Waterloo Station, that was what I wanted them to do. I would lie open in their hands watching them read the first few paragraphs, waiting for their smile, and the 'buying look.' But those things never came, or if they did, I could see the brutes reflecting that they could get me at the library and that bookstall prices are iniquitous; and back I would go, while they fumbled for sixpence to buy one of these magazines.

"Yes, my cover has always caught the eye. It does so still. I suppose you're about the tenth gentleman that's had me out this month. I've been here two years now, come Midsummer, and all

that time there's hardly been a soul who's stood in front of The Shelf but has taken me out. Look at the marks of all their dirty fingers on me. That's another thing. If I was black they wouldn't show. I'd still be decent. But just look at me, will you ? I'm twice as dirty and pulled about as any book here, and just because I used to be three times smarter. And the others don't let me forget it, not they !

" When I first came here I was still fairly presentable and I cost one and six ; that's top price, you know, among us of The Shelf—novels at any rate. Ever since I've been going down and every time twopence or a penny was knocked off me all the other books had something to say, just as they've something to say every time I'm put back. Oh, it's a gaudy life for a gaudy old novel here, on the Shelf. I expect it's hell, all right. I know all about hell because I lived next to a book on it when I came here first. But that book was mistaken. Burning would be fun to The Shelf.

" As for the man who wrote me——"

Before she could say something for which she might afterwards be sorry I had put her in my pocket and paid the ninepence by which she became mine. Surprise and joy made her dumb, but you should have heard the spiteful whispers which went round The Shelf. I believe they all turned green—those at any rate which weren't green before ; but I didn't stop to see.

I am glad to think that this little bit of rescue-work fell in my way. It is not often that a man is allowed to do something to repair so cheaply some of the harm he has done up and down the world.

XXXV. *Of the Weather.*

The weather has been so extraordinary that we can no longer refrain from congratulating ourselves upon it.

Whatever may be in store for us, we have had, in England and in April, three clear weeks (but for the day of our drive here from Beaulieu) of sun and soft wind. Nothing can alter this amazing fact.

Hitherto we have been careful to say very little about the weather. Occasional irrepressible exclamations of delight may have burst from us as we have wandered under the trees, marking the chequered play of the sunlight upon the ground and the gay sky up there between the young leaves, or, from high commons, have feasted our souls with these blue infinities of woodland. But we have always been scrupulous to confine our observations to the particular day on which they have been made. We have not so much as whispered the fact that we have been enjoying a period of miraculous fine weather. We know better. The Rain Man is asleep, but he has sharp ears and keeps one of them always open for boastful observations.

Yet, after three weeks, we no longer care. Let

him come on if he will. He may drench us all the way back to Brook if he pleases to be such a brute. He can't touch our three weeks, and we shall still be grateful to him. We shall urge our ass homewards through the downpour, chanting the praises of the Rain Man. He will be unable to make us angry with him.

There is, of course, a reason for his having been so sparing of his speciality; one doesn't exactly look for benevolence from the Rain Man. It is our mackintoshes that have caused him to hold his hand, our costly green oiled-silk coats about which we took such a lot of trouble before we came away.

And this reminds me that I have never yet given you an account of our procuring of these things. I'm sure I was to do so. Then let me fulfil my obligations, here and now.

You are to know that we are very much averse to getting wet. It gives us colds and sore throats and it is unpleasant besides.

Venturing, as we proposed to venture, into the Forest in April for a tour in a donkey-cart, it seemed to us very necessary that we should do everything in our power to keep ourselves dry. We could only hope for a small amount of really fine weather.

Now your ordinary mackintoshes were not good enough for us, because they are hot and stiff, and smell of rubber and are unbecoming to us. What we wanted was something new in the way of waterproofs, something which would combine the qualities of coolness and easiness with the scent

of eau-de-Cologne, the charm of a creation by Paquin and the imperviousness of asphalt.

I left the discovery of these ideal garments to my wife who is the clothing expert of our partnership.

She ransacked the West End and reported the discovery of oiled-silk coats. These, she assured me, were as light as feathers, as pliable as fine lawn, would shed water like a duck's back and would, if properly made of the proper shade of green, be extraordinarily becoming to me. Their scent, she was forced to admit, was not their best feature, it being the scent of linseed, but this, on the word of several tradesmen, would wear off almost at once.

I liked the idea of these mackintoshes. I said, "How much are they?"

My wife confessed their price. She had kept this to the end, lest I should decline to listen to their virtues.

Now Economy was to be the watchword of our expedition.

I refused to hear any more about these oiled-silk coats.

This was three weeks before we left London.

At the end of two weeks and four days I had come to believe that it was impossible to set out without mackintoshes of this character. "But," I said, "it is surely possible to obtain them at a lower figure than that you have mentioned." My wife said she was certain of it.

The name of Gamage occurred to me. Gamage is a man who does you anything in the Sporting line at a price which in the West End would be

considered impossible. I said, " Let us go and ask Gamage what he can do us oiled-silk coats at."

We went to Gamage and he produced his oiled-silk coats. They were cheap but unbecoming to me and none of them were of the proper shade of green. If we insisted on the proper shade of green they would have to be made specially and that would take more days than we had to spare. We told Gamage that we would think this over and if we could not get what we wanted ready-made we would let him know and he should send the coats on to us at Brook.

We then went into the West End. The weather was wet and we spent a great number of shillings driving in taxi-cabs from one oiled-silk coat shop to another. Everywhere we met with discouragement. Either there was in the shop but one coat of the right colour (and we were resolved to have two or none, because we wished to look uniform when we walked in the rain) or there were two but they were not of the right size ; or there were none, and the time to be taken in making them would be too great ; or the price was prohibitive. By six o'clock we were no nearer our green mackintoshes than at two and I was quite exhausted ; for shopping, as I have told you, tires me more quickly than anything in the world.

There remained one shop ; and we went into it.

This was a really miraculous shop. They could make us these coats in the turn of a hand. We could try them on the day after the morrow. This oiled-silk coat was a speciality of this house. They were always making them at a moment's

notice. They produced a book of patterns of oiled silk and there, among them, was the identical shade which my wife had decided would most become me.

The price, however, was prohibitive.

My wife turned away with a sigh. "Never mind," she said, "we'll have another hunt to-morrow."

I said, "We will have the mackintoshes of this shop."

"But the price!" she said.

"The price," I said, "is very reasonable. It will be a saving of money to close with these people. I would rather put my money into these coats than into taxi-fares to-morrow. As it is, these mackintoshes have already cost us an enormous amount of money and they are not ordered yet. Economy, remember, is the watch-word of our enterprise."

My reasoning had weight with my wife and she assented to the purchase of the coats of this shop. We were measured, we gave careful instructions as to the precise shade of silk we desired and we went away. *That* was done.

The day after the morrow we went to try on our mackintoshes.

An unexpected influx of orders had put the factory into difficulties; but, without fail, on the morrow we should find our coats waiting for us. On the morrow we were to leave London.

On the morrow we called—we were on our way to Waterloo.

The coats were produced.

They were of the wrong colour.

We pointed this out. " The shade we ordered," we said, " was much lighter. These coats are of so dark a green as to be almost black. And black," my wife added, " is not becoming to my husband."

The shopman pointed out that if we held the material up to the light we would find that, thus, it presented the exact shade which we had ordered.

We pointed out in our turn that we wished to wear these coats on our backs, not to carry them in our hands, over our heads, peering upwards in order to admire their pretty pale green colour.

The shopman spread his hands. He was sorry, but he could do nothing more, he was afraid.

You are to understand that we had no other mackintoshes and that we were on our way to catch our train.

Persons of character would have thrown these coats at their purveyor and left the shop, mackintoshless, and caught cold in the Forest next day through getting drenched, and died of pneumonia and otherwise asserted themselves.

But we—we took the damned mackintoshes and paid for them and flounced out of the shop and went to Waterloo. They did not even fit us becomingly.

" Never mind," said my wife, " perhaps we shall have fine weather and not have to wear the horrid things."

And up to now her hope has been marvellously fulfilled. Evidently the Rain Man was watching us in London. We might have known that so much preparation and anxiety and expenditure would

not go unnoticed by a cynic so perfect as the Rain Man. "Look at 'em," he must have said, "dashing about and spending their money to protect themselves from me. *I'll* show 'em." And then he must have gone and turned it off at the main.

Well, we don't complain. We praise him just the same. He is a fine fellow. And it was very cheap at the price, very, very cheap. Three weeks of sun in Spring for the cost of two oiled-silk coats and a few sovereigns in taxi-cabs. I would willingly have bought us four apiece and another for Jack, if I had thought such a result possible. But, of course, if we had gone about our purchases in that spirit we should have worn out three of those coats each by this time. The Rain Man is not to be cozened in that way.

This is all very bromidic.

In case you are one of the few people left who do not know what I mean, let me tell you.

Some years ago Mr. Gelett Burgess divided the human race into sulphites and bromides. Sulphites, he declared, did and said that which was unexpected. Bromides acted in the contrary way.

You know the person, who while making your acquaintance, when he discovers that you both know Jones, remarks, "How small the world is!" That is a bromidism.

Or again, "I never come out without my umbrella but it rains." That is another bromidism, hall-marked as such by Mr. Burgess himself.

These examples should be sufficient for any intelligent person.

Mr. Burgess collected a great number of such harmless observations, labelled the people who use them "bromides," labelled the people who don't "sulphites," and a new terror was added to life. We all took the thing up. We delighted, at first, in this entertainment provided for us sulphites of observing the bromidic nature of our friends. A new and choice dish was added to the fare of Intellectual Snobbery.

Presently we discovered that we were all bromides.

Then we were afraid to open our mouths lest our neighbours should know us for what we were.

Lastly the other bromides heard of it and went in for it heart and soul. They too became sulphites. And, Lord! how they enjoyed it and misunderstood it, often pointing out quite passable sulphitisms as bromidisms.

It is now the most bromidic thing in the world to be a sulphite. That is the Bromide's Revenge.

The New Bromidic-Sulphitism is chiefly exhibited by talking about bromides and bromidisms.

Why, then, do I do it?

Because I am a bromide. My observations upon our mackintoshes show that clearly.

But I have diverged from the weather.

But the weather is a subject so inconceivably bromidic that only a genuine sulphite may touch it.

And I am a bromide.

XXXVI. *Of our First Journey to Lymington.*

How we employed the other days of our stay in Brockenhurst I do not remember at all. I believe we made little excursions into the Forest (as on the morning when we lost Charles), here and there, painting and loafing and making the most of the continued sunny weather we had. These days led me wholly to revise my estimate of Brockenhurst and I now number it among the places where I have been very happy.

One morning we spent among the firs of Pignal Inclosure sniffing their scent and looking out between their stems over the green expanse of Balmer Lawn at the manœuvres of the ponies. Another we idled away up among the beeches near Hincheslea House. It was here that Jack dismally surprised my poor wife by suddenly lying down with the cart and her and all. This led to the purchase of the hammock of which I have written, and thereafter, when we made long halts, we always unhitched our ass and tethered him by the reins to a holly. He was happier so, as were we. We are still sorry that we had not thought of meeting his wishes in this way earlier; it only shows what may happen to a donkey that falls into the wrong hands. Another day we gathered wild hyacinths which we found in amazing quantities

up and down a delectable dell of Newlands Copse, hard by the Lymington River. But Charles did not come to help. I despair of guiding you to this place, but if you take the track that leads to the right from the Beaulieu Road at the foot of the first steep hill and follow it along Perry Wood Inclosure till you think you would like to leave it and then do so, through a gate, and trust to luck, you may or you may not find the place. But if you don't it doesn't matter. Wherever you go will be just as good.

These small excursions were made with a view to resting Jack after his suffering with that stone all morning in his foot.

After the Vinney Ridge drive (which we did, I think, on the third day) more rest was likely to be good for the dear beast. Also we were nearly mad with his slowness. I seem somewhere to have written in praise of slow-going. It is a thing, do you know, which can be overdone and we were beginning to think that Jack overdid it. He must have understood more than I supposed when I read the first ten parts of that sermon of mine to my wife as she sat in the cart under the big beech on the edge of Denny Wood. Well, I converted somebody at any rate.

We were unable to contemplate a ten-mile journey to Lymington and back behind our deliberate donkey. The road to Lymington is not a Forest road and it would be hot and dusty and long and intolerable. Yet we wanted to go to Lymington. I do not know why, but we wanted to do it. I think we liked the name.

I said to my wife, "Why shouldn't we hire a

horse for this little jaunt—old Bob next door, for instance? I could drive you over this afternoon. With Jack we shall take a week."

She replied, "Why not? An excellent idea."

Now I had never expected her to say that. She knew that I have never driven a horse. She was bound to know that it would be madness for me to try to do such a thing. Yet she agreed to my absurd and jesting proposal without a second's hesitation. It is awful to inspire confidence to such a degree. The truth is that my wife, having driven horses all her life, has a very imperfect understanding of their formidableness. She looks on a horse very much as I, now, regard a donkey—as a thing to drive, to make do what a man wishes, not in the least as a nervous creature of tremendous power which may at any moment do anyone of fifty things all equally likely to result in sudden death to the people who sit behind him.

I said, "It would amuse you to drive Bob, then?"

"Oh, no," she replied, "it wouldn't amuse me at all. I have seen Bob. But it will amuse you."

I saw that I could go no further along this line without appearing to be craven. I said, "Very well, *I* will drive this creature," and I slapped my leggings with my walking-stick and straddled my feet apart and looked ever so horsy. Then I went out to make the arrangements.

This Bob is the property of our next-door neighbour, who owns a small herd of horses and asses and is a fine example of the Forest horse-dealer. All his beasts live just behind my bedroom and in the morning the asses bray to the coming sun like so many cocks. Unlike my wife I had not yet seen

Bob. I had only heard about him from his master, who had already several times offered him to me for hire. I was now to accept this offer.

"Mr. Beans," I said, "I wonder if I can have Bob this afternoon to drive to Lymington."

"Well, indeed 'ee can," said Mr. Beans.

"He's quite well then?" I asked, endeavouring to look pleased.

"Well?" said Mr. Beans. "Never wur better. Best horse in the Forest, Bob is."

"I suppose," I said—for with the responsibility of a young woman on my shoulders I had to satisfy myself about one or two matters—"I suppose he's pretty quiet, eh?"

"Quiet?" said Mr. Beans, looking at me with one piercing little eye. "Lord love 'ee!"

"I mean," said I, "that he don't shy or kick or bolt? I must own to you, Mr. Beans," I said, "that I am not a skilful horse driver. If it were a donkey, now, I shouldn't be so anxious."

"Does Bob shy or kick or bolt?" cried Mr. Beans. "Lord bless us, sir, do 'ee think I'd let 'un out with you if he did? I'm no murderer, I'm not."

"You relieve me, Mr. Beans," I said, all need for pretence being at an end. "Then you think I can manage him?"

"Ah," said Mr. Beans, "I don't say that. It takes somebody to manage my Bob. But I'll tell you this. You tell him whur you want to go, and he'll take 'ee thur. Say Lymington and he'll take 'ee to Lymington. Say Lyndhurst and he'll take 'ee to Lyndhurst. A horse like thicky," said Mr. Beans, "do come in most handy of a Saturday

night," and Mr. Beans winked at me in a very depraved way indeed.

Thus recommended, Bob appeared at our front door just after lunch. He appeared to me to be a very enormous horse. I fancy I had come to think in terms of donkeys.

While we waited for my wife, Mr. Beans and I talked of horses and asses, Mr. Beans' speciality.

I told him, as an instance of Jack's sagacity, that, the day before, while he stood tethered to the ornamental railings outside our sitting-room, my donkey had attempted to eat a large green and yellow painted cast-iron conventionalized sun-flower, part of those railings. "He knew," I said, "that the thing was intended for a flower and he knew that flowers are highly edible. His intelligence is of so high a level that he could not conceive of any reason for working objects that resemble sun-flowers into the design of an iron railing."

Mr. Beans capped my story at once by telling me about a donkey of his own which he sent to a buyer in the Isle of Wight. During the journey the creature ate its own label and when it landed at Cowes no one knew whence it had come or whither it was bound. It took them a week to find out and meanwhile the donkey ran up a handsome bill for board and lodging. "He wanted his idle time," said Mr. Beans, "like the rest on us, and by Gor! he got en. Can't tell I nothing about donkeys' cleverness, sir," said Mr. Beans.

My wife appeared and we climbed into a most uncomfortable dog-cart. Mr. Beans said, "Lymington, Bob," and smote the beast on the stern with

an encouraging palm. Bob proceeded to take us to Lymington.

At first it appeared to us that we travelled at a positively dangerous rate of speed. It was a little under six miles an hour, but after our slug's walk round the Forest behind Jack things seemed to fly past us and the wind to whistle over our ears. After a few minutes, however, our first sensation of terror passed away and I began to dare—positively—to enjoy the knowledge that I was holding reins which were attached to so stupendous and powerful an animal.

Bob was a brown horse shaped a good deal like a pear. Imagine the base of the pear between the shafts and its apex turned towards Lymington. His head was a long way off; perhaps it was this that made it seem so small, for it was already quite insufficient. His mane was long and wild and flew and flapped upon his neck with each lurch of his body. And how he lurched! We shook about in the cart like dice in a dice-box. My wife could hold on to the side of the cart, but I needed both my hands for the reins and I was forced to execute prodigies of balance and recovery. It is lucky that it did not matter at all whether I helped myself now and then with a rein: Bob was going to Lymington and had no room in his skull for any other thought. Certainly, what the person behind him might be doing with the reins was a matter which did not concern him in the least.

Just after we left Brockenhurst a thing happened.

All this time we have not seen one snake in all

our wanderings and the Forest is said to be full of snakes.

As we came to the top of a little hill I saw a long wavy stick lying in the road which at first sight I took for a serpent. Bob evidently did the same for he shied at this stick (in spite of Mr. Beans' statements) and galloped for, maybe, ten yards. When my heart had sunk back into its usual place I said, "See how clever this animal is, this old Forester. He takes no chances from adders, not even from sticks that look like them. We have just seen an example of instinct acquired through countless generations of ancestors who have learned the danger of stepping on snakes and handed on the knowledge to this piriform hippopotamus."

As I spoke I perceived an undoubted serpent and a monstrous one just in front of us, wriggling across the road. At the time I believed it to be a boa-constrictor, though now I know that it was not. Giving myself up for lost and commending my wife and myself to our Maker, I tightened my grasp upon the reins and leaned back in my seat.

Bob passed on right over the snake without a stagger.

This is why I know it was neither a boa-constrictor nor indeed a snake of any dangerous kind. It was, of course, just one of those grass snakes, blind worms or whatever they ought to be called. The instinct of the Forest horse told Bob that it was quite safe to tread on the creature. Bless you, you can't deceive an old Forester like Bob in the matter of snakes.

Ten minutes later a peal of thunder rumbled

across the Forest to the north and looking back I saw the sky black from end to end with the coming of a storm. It was necessary to return. I had no mind to be out in a thunderstorm at the mercy of this big strong horse. Suppose he should take fright at the lightning and bolt! I had not mentioned thunder when I got his character from Mr. Beans. Suppose he should upset us and break our necks. And at the best it would be abominable to be out in a downpour in this dog-cart. And the lightning might strike us and hurt us.

I cried, "Whoa! Whoa!" to Bob and hauled on the reins.

As Mr. Beans had said, it took somebody to manage Bob. He was evidently quite unaware of my wishes. He just went on taking us into Lymington.

I said, "Perhaps, after all, we had better go on now. It must be streaming in Brockenhurst already. These Forest storms are very local in character. Let us hope that the thunder will stay among the trees and not pursue us into this open country. Probably by the time we get back to Brockenhurst this storm will have spent itself," and I urged Bob onwards with my voice.

The thunder—disregarding my hopes—left the trees and came after us into the open country. It roared upon our track like some wild beast. The lightning fell, it seemed, incessantly. I expected every moment to find Bob bolting with us into Lymington, but I did not. It is now clear to me that he was unaware of the storm.

In front of us all the sky was a pure and serene blue and the sun still shone upon us. So long as

we kept our eyes towards Lymington and closed our ears to the din that was going on, we could imagine that we were enjoying the finest possible weather. But when we looked a trifle aside or overhead we were instantly aware of the tremendous black arch that rushed imminent upon our track. I was greatly terrified.

An inn appeared on the road ahead of us, and a few heavy drops began to fall. "Now," thought I, encouraged by the sight of shelter to try again, "if I can stop this lumbering fool by any means, I propose to do it," and I again began to haul on the reins. I pulled like a madman. I shouted "Whoa! Whoa!" I pulled till the veins started out on the backs of my hands. Bob went on taking us into Lymington. I gave up in despair and, as we came rolling at the same even gait up to the door of this desirable little public-house, I said, "Well, go on and be blowed to you!" and sank back in my seat.

Instantly I was projected forwards against the dash-board. Bob had stopped, as he had intended to do all the time.

In a minute my wife was in shelter and I had housed Bob and the cart in a shed. Then I joined my wife and we had tea while the flood-gates of heaven were opened upon the New Inn.

Like this Forest and all other places called New this inn was one of great age. It was so small, moreover, that we could hardly get into it. But we did not mind being cramped so long as we were not being taken to Lymington through the storm.

While we drank tea there came up to the inn door a procession of caravans and all the elements

of a fair—merry-go-rounds, shooting-galleries, and so forth,—packed away on waggons and drawn in a long train by a traction engine. The show-people were there, too, in some numbers. They were all going to Lymington for the annual fair. Presently they passed onwards, refreshed.

The thought of this fair greatly excited us. You are to remember that, since our leaving Lyndhurst, the little group which had formed round our poor ass on the occasion of our entry into Brockenhurst had been the largest collection of people that we had seen. The slumbering instincts of the citizen awoke in us, the desire to move among a crowd, to rub shoulders once more with our fellows, to hear men talking all about us, to get away for a while from desert Nature and taste again the comfortable bustle of the hive.

It was, I fancy, these instincts which were taking us now into busy Lymington (or helping Bob to do it), but till this moment they had acted upon us subconsciously. Now they rose up into full activity and we lusted for the fair. We had spent no money on anything but board and lodging for nearly three weeks and our coppers began to grow hot in our pockets. Our desire was suddenly towards those shooting-galleries and merry-go-rounds and coco-nut shies and boat swings and cinematograph-shows which we had seen packed upon the waggons.

"Come on," we said, as soon as the rain stopped, "let us hasten into Lymington. We may yet be in time for this fair."

We extracted Bob from his shed and he proceeded to take us into Lymington.

We overtook the caravans just at the entering in of the town. All Lymington, it seemed, had turned out to meet the circus. There was at any rate a dense and excited throng in the road ahead of us.

Our entrance was perfectly timed; we reached this crowd just as the foremost caravan halted at its skirts. We too halted, for a policeman told us to do so and Bob knew better than to disobey a policeman. I think we looked very well at the head of the procession, my wife in her cherry-coloured jersey and I in my natty driving-clothes. I lit a cigarette, put one hand on my hip and waited to be photographed.

Then it was that I discovered that all the heads of the crowd were turned quite away from me. They were gazing up a little side-street, whence came hoarse shouts of command. The policeman suddenly waved his arms, the crowd scattered, and out of the side-street came the Lymington fire-engine, its heroes clustered upon it, buttoning their tunics and putting their helmets firmly in place. The crowd cheered, the engine burst through them and was gone. We were permitted to proceed and the crowd was at last able to devote some of its attention to us. But the flavour was quite gone from our moment.

Bob took us unerringly to the Angel Hotel, turned in under the archway, halted in the stable-yard and gave us permission to amuse ourselves for an hour or two.

Because we had come to Lymington for excitement this was early closing day in Lymington and the fair did not open until the morrow. I had

always believed that early closing days existed for the purpose of enabling the shop-people to get exercise and fresh air. If that was their employment on that particular afternoon they were engaged upon it elsewhere than in Lymington High Street, for no inmost glade of Highland Water Inclosure could have been more desperately deserted of men than was that ancient road. Perhaps this was because the rain and the thunder had begun again.

We sat in a chilly room just over the porch of the Angel and watched the water lash the empty pavements, stared at a line of shutters, turned a week-old *Daily Mirror* (which we had already seen) and a Guide to the Hotels of England. Bob meanwhile ate corn in a cosy stable and swopped horse gossip with his neighbours in the stalls at either side of him.

If only we had not had tea at the New Inn we should have wished for it now. But we could not wish for it; we could only order it and eat it. It passed ten minutes or so.

"But," said I, "to-morrow it will be fine again. This thunder will have cleared the air. And to-morrow we will return and do the Fair in style and forgive Lymington for letting us down in this shameful way."

Two hours passed by.

Every twenty minutes or so I went out into the stable-yard and looked towards Brockenhurst. I had no mind to have my poor wife drenched and I sought a clear sky to the north of us.

At last I saw it—or thought I did—and gave the word to the ostler. There had been no thunder

for a quarter of an hour. We could venture forth.

We did so, arrayed, at last, in our green mackintoshes. I said, " Home, Bob," and the honest beast began to take us there.

As we turned out of the High Street the most appalling deluge that it has ever been my lot to encounter broke above our devoted heads ; the urns of the rain appeared to be inverted upon us. A flash of horrifying brilliance and nearness succeeded and then—it was as if the world rocked to a shattering concussion. Bob, entirely unconcerned, went on taking us home.

I was so frightened that I could hardly sit upright. My wife improvised verses about the rain as she shook it out of her eyes. She understood that it was perfectly safe because otherwise I should not have taken her out in it.

The water spouted from our impervious mackintoshes and collected in a small pond in the bottom of the cart.

This dreadful state of affairs lasted only three or four minutes. The storm went quicker than Bob and it was only the tail of it that had attacked us. All the way home it roared and flashed ahead of us over Brockenhurst always growing remoter. The sun came out ; the birds began to sing. I was able to sit up again.

Every minute, all the way home, the black sky at which we stared would split from the zenith to the trees. It was a gorgeous exhibition and we thoroughly enjoyed it. It was going away.

XXXVII. *Of our Second Journey to Lymington.*

For lack of any other conveyance we went to Lymington Fair by train.

Frankly, we had had enough of Mr. Beans' Bob : he shook us too much.

Jack was out of the question. We remembered that this was to be our last Brockenhurst day and that our donkey must rest against the long four-mile stage to Lyndhurst that we required of him on the morrow. We were invincibly humane when we thought of driving Jack to the Lymington Fair at one mile an hour (for this has become his established pace) over country which we had already traversed at six.

You say that we might have hired a motor-car in Brockenhurst.

I am afraid I have not said enough, even yet, to convince you of the impropriety of any such suggestion. Please do not make it again. We have been very good friends so far and I do not wish to quarrel with you.

I am not concerned very much to defend our conduct in employing the train. It was a proceeding conceived not exactly in the best spirit of donkey-touring ; this I will admit. But it was the only respectable method open to us of getting

to Lymington Fair, to which we had, you understand, positively to go. And I have little to say against trains. They are mechanical, certainly, but they are antique (at least the Brockenhurst–Lymington train is) and they stick to their own roads. You can get away from them when you want to. They do not choke you, and their occupants do not try to kill you. Trains are really lovable things compared with some means of locomotion.

At any rate, we took the train.

We gave Jack a little gentle exercise and a little fresh air in the morning and, after lunching, hied us to Brockenhurst Station, the holiday, fair mood strongly at work within us. What fun we were going to see, to be sure!

We have now increased our rate of progress to ten miles an hour and find it very stimulating. Once and again it is good to set the blood coursing properly through the body. See those telegraph poles! how they skip away behind us! And that red barn that we saw ten minutes ago; where is it now? Out of sight already, so help me Heaven! Dangerous, perhaps, but how delightful! Peril is truly the salt of life to us English.

This captivating experience was over all too soon. We found ourselves in Lymington before we had realised that we had left Brockenhurst. With shining eyes we went out of the station and enquired for the Fair. They sent us down a long, long street.

To-day Lymington was an oven. It might have been August in Khartoum instead of early May in Hampshire. In five minutes we were very nearly dead. Had it not been for a shady side we should have been quite dead.

We reached the end of the long, long street and enquired for the Fair again. They sent us down another street, even longer. This was at right angles to the first and the sun beat upon every inch of it. We became light-headed. We began to forget why we had come to Lymington. One of us remembered that there was said to be a fair in the town that afternoon. But a fair did not seem to be a satisfactory reason for our presence in this Tophet. Surely we could never have come here for a fair. Why were we not among the trees in Holland's Wood or the Queen's Bower, with our trusty thermos at our side and the hammock pendent between two birches? What were we doing in this terrible street? At this point we died.

Suddenly we found the Fair. It too was dead. The merry-go-round had died when it was about half-way erected. The sun had smitten the shooting-galleries while they were yet bare poles and loading-counters. The boat swings had expired on their waggon.

A few exceptionally strong little children stood about gaping at these things and in the shade of a caravan lay one or two of the gypsy show-folk whom we had seen at the New Inn.

We put a question to them and they told us that there would be no activity among them until the evening. They seemed to think us foolish to have come to the Fair at two o'clock in the afternoon of its first day.

We bethought us of the Angel Inn where at least tea might be procured. No Australian explorers suffered more horrid torments than did

we during our journey to the Angel Inn. There is a tremendous hill to climb, as much as fifty feet of it, I dare say. If there had been a cab in Lymington it could have had our fortune for a lift up that hill. But there was no cab. I like to think that it lost the opportunity of its life. Even now I curse it for not being there.

At length tea was making new men of us. We took a tea of many pots. We lay about in that sweet cool room over the porch and looked out in heavenly comfort at the baking High Street. Occasionally we rang the bell for more tea.

"And now," I said, "let us get away from this terrible little town." And I descended to ask about the trains back. With all this tea in us we could slowly stroll the half-mile to the train without much danger.

The next train to Brockenhurst, it appeared, would go in just three seconds. The one after that would leave in about three hours.

I returned to report this news to my wife.

Now you are to know that we had already looked through the copy of the *Daily Mirror* five or six times and half through the Hotel Guide once. And we had drunk more tea already than we ought and very nearly more than we could. The High Street of Lymington could not have paid us to go and look into its shops. Other entertainment there was none.

I went downstairs again to ask the Landlord of the Angel please what were we to do. He suggested a drive in a motor-car.

I left him and went upstairs to complain to my wife of what he had said. She soothed me and said

that it was a very good suggestion of the Landlord's. We should perhaps get cool in a motor-car. "It is one thing," she said, "to have a conscientious objection to alcohol, founded upon principle and considerations of the welfare of humanity; it is another to refuse its assistance medicinally as a stimulant in moments of physical crisis. Apply this reasoning. Think of the cool air blowing against our faces. We can be by the sea in half an hour, out of this sweltering cup where we are. Think of the Channel and the Channel wind. Let us have a swoop along the cliffs."

Or did I say this? No matter.

A few minutes later we were hurling through space at twenty miles an hour. The wind was on our faces. Every second we could smell it stronger and fresher and salter. Life flowed into us. We breathed. We lived. We told the chauffeur to drive faster.

The Angelic Host, there in Lymington behind us, had provided rugs and overcoats. We were in no danger of catching cold.

We gave ourselves up to the enjoyment of Speed.

Our faces assumed a haughty and insolent expression: we stared pityingly at the people whom we covered with dust, the people we bombarded with pebbles. We leaned back in our seats and surveyed the road with the eyes of conquerors. We grew angry with carts and perambulators which caused us to slacken our pace.

There was one miserable couple that we overtook, a man and a woman driving a donkey-cart. They were intensely annoying to us, being very deliberate in their making way. It seemed as if they pur-

posely checked their ass as he drew aside. We said that it was scandalous that such nuisances should be allowed on the high-roads. When at length they cleared off and let us through we stared arrogantly at them and laughed at their donkey. They looked at us with poison in their eyes, but I leaned forwards and made the toot sound and we rushed away from them. Our last sight of them showed them covering their mouths and holding their noses.

Damn them!

Shortly after this my wife began to complain that her eyes were getting quite filled with flies. As I wear spectacles I had not suffered in this way, but at once I bade our chauffeur make the best of his speed to Milford and there I bought goggles for my wife. After this we felt more complete and were able, both of us, to scorn the pedestrians.

From Milton there is, I believe, a fine view of the Needles and the Channel and the Isle of Wight. We would have liked to stay and look at this view for a long time, but we had not become aware of it before it was behind us. Our chauffeur had seen this view many times and wanted to get on—no matter where—ON! We turned inland among fields and hedges. Next moment we were at Barton. Here was another chance of looking at that Needles' View. I opened my mouth to beg our driver to halt, but several flies seized the opportunity thus offered them and I did not recover the power of speech until we were a mile away from Barton, and dashing down upon Highcliff. I once spent a Summer at Highcliff and I thought it might be interesting to drive past the house in

which I stayed. I told the chauffeur to turn to the right. He grunted a reply of some kind and rushed straight on. He and Bob are a couple.

I gave up hoping to do anything but enjoy the sensation of rapid movement and leaning back again I looked about for pedestrians to insult with my glances.

Nothing happened for a long time save that the sky became overcast and the cool delicious wind that had hitherto fanned our cheeks grew suddenly piercingly cold. We buttoned up our coats and tucked our rugs around us.

We were now on the great open Christchurch–Lyndhurst Road, and clear of trees. For miles ahead of us we could see our path and it was quite empty of life. This was the part of our journey to which I had most eagerly been looking forward. It is some of the finest moor scenery in the Forest.

The chauffeur, rejoicing in his exit from the cramped tangle of lanes through which we had hitherto been travelling, did something to his car and we began to cover the ground in earnest.

We now became aware of the flight of dirt and pebbles against our faces, spectacles and goggles. These things stung and were unpleasant. I howled to the chauffeur to know why this was being done to us.

He turned a face plastered yellow with dirt and howled back that one of the front mud-guards was off.

I howled back to him to put it on again.

He howled back that it was in Lymington. It was only our suddenly increased pace that caused the bombardment, he said.

I ordered him to slacken his pace.

He thought I was joking, with all that free road ahead of him, and, doing something more to the engine, he caused his car to lose all sense of decency and moderation.

I thought of the cases of which I have read of chauffeurs who have gone mad when driving their cars. I saw that it was better not to thwart this fellow.

The mud and pebbles now made it impossible for us to remain erect any longer. We crouched down on the floor of the car and let the storm fly over our heads. We also covered ourselves with rugs and coats so that the rain which had begun should not wet us more than we could help.

Thus, crushed together in a sort of little dark tent, chilled to the bone and with the mud caking upon our cheeks, we flew along under the guidance of a mad chauffeur, rocking and bounding and swooping and skidding, every moment rattled together by some lurch of the car or forcibly sundered and flung against the sides of our prison. Sometimes I would make a little peephole in our coverings and look dreadfully out. I remember a glimpse of the railway line and I remember one of the Naked Man, gaunt and grisly and dim through the lashing rain. He seemed to have his thumb to his nose.

When at last we drew up at our Brockenhurst lodgings and crawled out from our shelter, the chauffeur was grinning with delight. He had made a record for himself, it appeared. I knew he was mad.

XXXVIII. *Of the Last Journey.*

Our time is now all but up. In three days we must meet Siena on Salisbury platform and betake ourselves to that Wiltshire house of which I have written.

At Brockenhurst we are ten good miles from Brook.

It seems ludicrous to suppose that Jack can do this distance in a day, loaded with all the baggage and the many extra stones of weight which we have put on since our setting out. We do not even contemplate it. Our little friend shall be asked to do nothing superasinine as a last reward for all his faithful hauling. But we hope that he will not think us abusive if we require him to take us four miles, one day, to Lyndhurst, and six, with a long rest somewhere, from Lyndhurst to Brook the next.

He has in truth grown very slow and I have given up beating him and urging him except absent-mindedly. I now sing to him, for the sun acts on me as on a thrush. Yet even as I sing the ingrained habits of three weeks cause my arm to rise and my throat to roar huskily. Thus on this fine bright morning, as we set forth from Brockenhurst, these woods echo to one long solo by the

walking ass-driver of which the following is a specimen.

(Sung, with an intense sentimentality) I'll sing thee so-hongs of Arabee and ta-hales of old (spoken) Go on! (sung) Wild tales to cheat thee (spoken) *Go* on, Jack! (sung) Or charm thee (spoken) *Come* up! (sung) a tear—(whack!) And (whack!) of de—(whack!) shall on thee (whack!) And *Hup* you come, you little *blighter!* And all my so-houl shall (spoken) *Come* along! (sung) Con*found* you! co-home a—(whack!) And all my (whack!) (spoken) Come *up!* Jack. Gorrr-darrr'ee then. Wull 'ee gate on then! (sung) Sweet wo-honder een your eyes. To (whack!) thee of a (whack!) or (whack!) thee too-hoo a (falsetto) teeeearrr!

Suddenly, a mile from Brockenhurst, all this effort became unnecessary. The ass began to trot of his own accord. I had nothing to do but run behind. I had no breath for further singing. Jack ran like a hare; up hill, down hill, on the level, it was all one to this racing donkey.

He had suddenly comprehended that he had got his nose set for home. His desire was towards his meadow, the society of Billy, separation from this abominable cart and these tiresome fools who must needs always be going somewhere or hanging about in the woods all day.

He devoured the Lyndhurst Road and it seemed hardly any time before we were in front of the little Crown and Stirrup calling for great ginger-beers. He had done the four miles in sixty-five minutes, a feat unparalleled in all our journeys, and he was as brisk and fresh as if he had not yet

started. It is clear that he has been malingering all this month. Lord ! if you had but seen him five days ago creeping out to Five Mile Hill on a good level road with nothing in the cart but my wife and the hammock and the lunch and a few painting things—ears down, tail anywhere, head hanging —you would have thought that no ass, since creation, had been so brutally overloaded.

Well, well ! We were in no hurry, and had he acted always as he is acting to-day we should have covered every yard of the Forest by this time and have nothing to learn about it. Whereas there are still Christchurch and Burley and all Burley Walk and miles of heathland to the north —Broomy Walk and Ashley Walk and Eyeworth Walk—which await our inspection next time we come this way. But it is not to the New Forest that we shall confine our travels next time. With this active beast we may expect to do all Wessex in a month.

Having landed us in Lyndhurst five or six hours before we expected to get there, Jack, we felt, might now pay for his fun by carrying us all the way to Brook. Such a fresh and vigorous donkey would make nothing of an extra six miles. We abandoned, therefore, our plan of sleeping in Lyndhurst and sent Jack through that town at his top pace and out on the Cadnam Road before he had time to realize that, being in a populous place, his duty to himself bade him walk.

In a breath we were at the Kennels. In another we were threatened with arrival at Cadnam. The sun was still very high and we did not want

to finish our leisurely travels by tearing over the last stage at this reckless rate. We called a halt by Brock's Hill, slung the hammock, took Jack out of the cart, tethered him to the sweetest looking holly we could find and sat down for three hours.

I reduced a pretty clean Whatman board to a condition suitable for tearing up ; my wife taught Jack Spanish. We both tried to pretend that when this sun should set our voyage would not be over.

Yes, though our tryst with Siena was not for two days yet, though on the morrow we would most likely take Jack and the cart for one last day in the Beeches Theatre, this sun, we knew, would set upon our donkey-tour. Arrival at the Boarding Cottage would write the end to these irresponsibilities. The circle would be complete. Our morrow in the Beeches Theatre would be but a mere filling in of time, a waiting for the strenuous life of housekeeping and book-making to begin again. It would have no connection with the donkey-tour. It must be regarded only as a respite, if it would not prove an anti-climax.

We were both rather sad as we put the things back in the cart and fastened the harness for the last time around the ass, and as we took the road we did not sing and we did not urge the steps of our little beast. We were now in country that we had already come through and our eyes were busy with this full-clothed woodland, where a month ago we had passed and seen never a leaf save the tender tufts of the hawthorns, and our memories were

filled with the countless incidents of that great change which we had witnessed, the coming of the Spring upon the Forest. Here was that little Minstead Road which lured us to Emery Down; we waved a farewell along it and a cuckoo, high on a fir, returned the salute on behalf of Shave Wood. On this bit of the road we had danced to the grinding of the Italian. And there is Cadnam and the Sir John Barleycorn and there goes the Ringwood Road between its beeches to the wide great heaths beyond Stony Cross and the wide great views over Bolderwood to the Island.

And now we are past the brook of Brook, and now we are at the meadow of Miss Ellen and Miss Jessie, where stands fat Billy, wondering perhaps where his late companion has got to all these weeks. And now the Boarding Cottage comes into view and I whack the ass down the little hill that we may come up smartly to the gate. And twenty yards from the gate Jack slows down to a walk.

But Miss Ellen comes out.

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XXXIX. *Of our Good-bye.*

My wife and I walked up to the Common just after sunset.

The golfers were all gone home, and we sat under the edge of the Round Wood by the Fordingbridge Road and watched the light fade above the trees of Bramble Hill.

And we built a little altar of stones and on it we made a little fire of dead leaves and twigs and we burned a cake of chocolate to the sun for his kindness to us.

Then we said "Good night" to the Forest and went back into Brook whose lights twinkled hospitably down there by the bridge.

* * * * *

Now you know why we are in the Beeches Theatre this morning instead of at Lyndhurst. Will you not have another Cigarette?

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